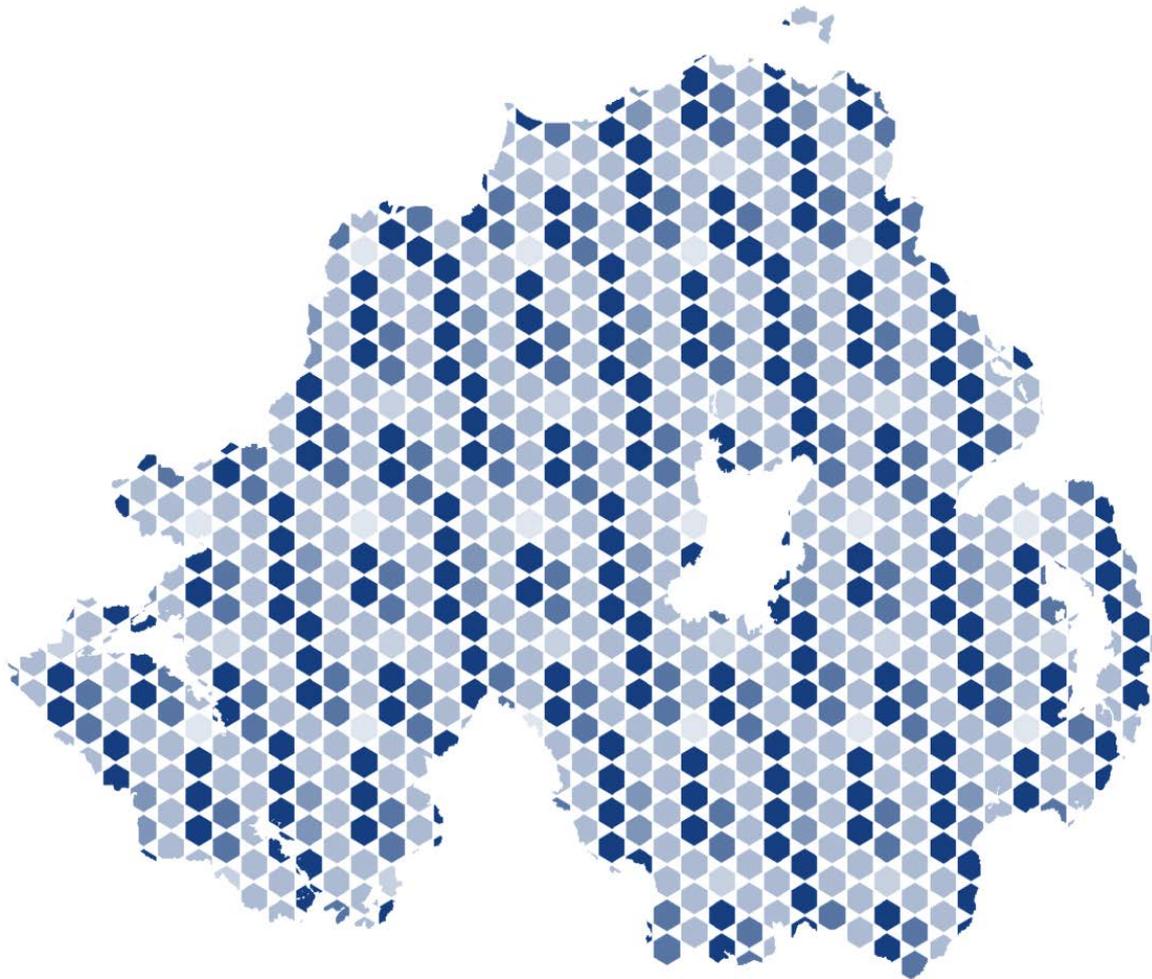


Education and Training Inspectorate

POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Belfast Royal Academy

Voluntary Grammar, selective, co-educational 11-19 school DE Ref No: 142-0028

Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection in October 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments



Sustaining Improvement Inspection of Belfast Royal Academy (142-0028)

Introduction

Belfast Royal Academy took part in the pilot of the sustaining improvement inspection in June 2016. In the interim a number of significant changes have occurred at senior leadership, with consequent review of roles and responsibilities aligned to the school development plan priorities, including in relation to: the welfare and well-being of the pupils; raising standards across the school; and support for those pupils who require additional help with aspects of their learning.

A sustaining improvement inspection was conducted in October 2019.

Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on evaluating the extent to which the school is capable of demonstrating its capacity to effect improvement through self-evaluation and effective school development planning. The school also provided evidence of provision for safeguarding as part of the inspection.

The lines of inquiry during the inspection were the school's actions to:

- raise achievement across the school; and
- develop the pupils' application of their skills including leadership, organisation, resilience, initiative and communication.

Key findings

- The senior leadership team is building a well-founded and effective culture of continuing improvement, which permeates all levels of leadership in the school.
- The robust quality monitoring arrangements ensure that improvement planning is built upon an adept analysis of a range of sources of first-hand evidence. The evidence includes, but is not limited to, detailed tracking of assessments of each pupil's progress. Opportunities for the pupils to comment on the effectiveness of their learning is an increasing and important aspect of the well-embedded cycles of evaluation.
- Since the original inspection the percentage of pupils attaining three or more examinations at GCE 'A' level (including equivalents) at grades A*-C has improved from 71% in 2016 to 74% in 2019. Although this remains below the Northern Ireland (NI) average¹ there is evidence of improvement and greater consistency in outcomes across the departments in the school. Over the corresponding period, most subjects at GCSE level performed in line with, or above, the respective NI subject averages². The performance of the pupils entitled to free school meals achieving at least seven subjects, including English and mathematics at GCSE at grades A*-C level improved significantly from 70% in 2016 to 88% in 2019.

¹ For schools in the same Free School Meals band.

² In those subjects for which there are corresponding NI subject averages.

- The pupils who met with the inspectors spoke very positively about their experiences in school in particular they highlighted: the opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities, the supportive teachers who help them develop research, revision and study skills; and their commitment to and enjoyment of a wide range of challenging activities beyond the classroom.
- The quality of learning and teaching within the classrooms ranged from good to outstanding. Almost all of the lessons observed were very good or outstanding. In these highly effective lessons the pupils, guided expertly by their teachers, took the lead in their own learning. The teachers used skilfully local and global current affairs and topical issues to engage the pupils in meaningful learning activities. The pupils responded with enthusiasm and high levels of engagement. In the best examples of the most effective learning, the pupils understood the relevance of their learning, applied their knowledge in different contexts and identified the important transferable skills they were developing.
- The school has deepened the pupils' knowledge of the range of skills and qualifications required for the world of work through a network of partnerships between the school and other schools, local and international employers and universities in Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The senior pupils who met with the inspectors spoke highly of the guidance and support they receive from their teachers which enables them to make informed choices about appropriate career pathways and the next stage of their learning.

Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The pupils, with whom the inspectors met, reported that they feel safe in school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

Conclusion

Belfast Royal Academy continues to demonstrate the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the pupils. The ETI will continue to monitor how the school sustains improvement.

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