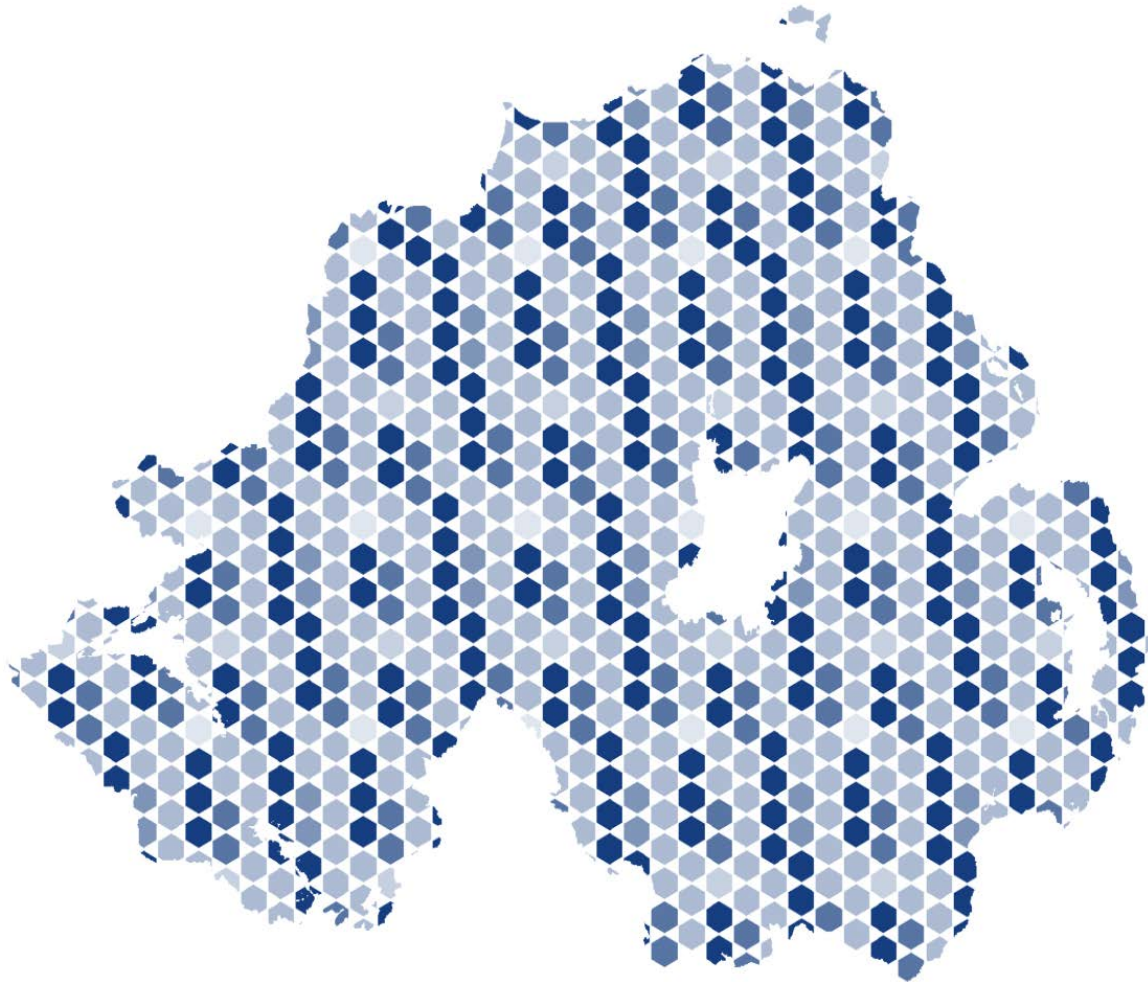


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

De La Salle College, Belfast

All boys', maintained, non-grammar, 11-19 school

Report of a Follow-up Inspection
(Involving Action Short of Strike)
in October 2018



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

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FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF DE LA SALLE COLLEGE, BT11 8LT (123-0182)

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out an inspection of De La Salle College in November 2016¹, which concluded that the school needed to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners.

The areas for improvement identified in the inspection were the need to:

- improve the quality of planning, teaching and assessment, including in the discrete provision for English, mathematics and modern languages;
- review and improve the curriculum offer and access to better meet the abilities, interests and career aspirations of the pupils;
- review and clarify the roles and responsibilities of all post holders to better align with school development planning, support more effectively staff development needs and develop more robust self-evaluation practices;
- develop appropriate and effective lines of communication in all aspects of the work of the school, and to commit fully to the development of an ethos that values openness, transparency, mutual respect and consultation; and
- improve the effectiveness of strategic leadership at all levels at leading and bringing about school improvement.

During the inspection, the quality of the provision in English, modern languages, careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) and pastoral care were evaluated as having important areas for improvement; the quality of provision in mathematics and planning, teaching and assessment were evaluated as requiring significant improvement and the curriculum planning and review process was identified as requiring urgent attention.

The Department of Education entered the school into the Formal Intervention Process under the Every School a Good School² policy on 21 December 2016.

At the time of the inspection, the school's arrangements for safeguarding were unsatisfactory and did not reflect adequately the guidance from the Department of Education. The ETI carried out a follow-up inspection of the arrangements for child protection/safeguarding in January 2017; on the basis of the evidence available, the arrangements for safeguarding remained unsatisfactory. The ETI carried out a second follow-up for child protection/safeguarding, commissioned by the Department of Education, in May 2017 when the revised arrangements for safeguarding were evaluated as reflecting broadly the guidance from the Department of Education.

The school's post-inspection action plans identified key actions to bring about improvement and the school development plan (SDP) was adjusted in light of the inspection findings. The progress being made in the areas for improvement was discussed with the school in an interim follow-up inspection visit (IFuV) carried out by the ETI in February 2018. During the IFuV, which was impacted by action short of strike, it was identified that further work on the SDP was required in order to make it compliant³. A follow-up inspection was carried out in October 2018.

¹ https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/post-primary-inspection-de-la-salle-college-belfast-123-0182_2.pdf

² <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/every-school-good-school-policy-school-improvement>

³ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/annex-a-school-development-plans-regulations-2010.pdf>

Four of the teaching unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) have declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute. This includes non-co-operation with the ETI. Prior to the inspection, the school informed the ETI that it would be engaging in the inspection process with regards to professional discussions and provision of evidence but not with regards to lesson observations. The ETI has a statutory duty to monitor, inspect and report on the quality of education under Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Therefore, the inspection proceeded and the following evaluations are based on the evidence as made available at the time of the inspection.

In the interval since the initial inspection, the school received external support from the Education Authority, for leadership and management, with a particular focus on action-planning and staff development.

During this period, other actions or changes which affect the work of the school include:

- the school received support from its employing authority, the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools, in relation to leadership, management and governance;
- significant changes in staffing, including acting capacities at middle and senior leadership level;
- an overall decrease in the school enrolment from 1104 pupils to 934, however there has been an increase in the year 8 enrolment from 109 pupils in 2017 to 129 pupils in 2018;
- the percentage of pupils with special educational needs has increased by nearly 10 percentage points, from 54.6% to 63.7%;
- a planned whole-school professional development programme is in place which is linked clearly to the priorities in the school development plan; and
- the board of governors now link with the senior leaders in order to be better informed about school improvement.

Views of parents and staff

A small number of parents (16) responded to the online questionnaire and nearly all expressed satisfaction with their child's care and welfare in the school. The parents also highlighted that they have been informed how to report a child protection or safeguarding matter. Just over three-fifths of these respondents provided written comments, a majority of whom acknowledged their appreciation of the supportive staff; a small number expressed concerns in relation to the curriculum offer.

Twenty-eight percent of staff (46) responded to the online questionnaire. All of the staff acknowledged that they: had participated in staff training for child protection and safeguarding; and are aware of the school's procedures in relation to child protection and safeguarding. A significant minority of staff provided written comments, of whom most recognised that the school is focused on moving forward and staff are working hard to bring about the required improvement. However, nearly one-half of the staff who provided written comments raised concerns about (in summary): elements of the curricular provision; aspects of leadership in relation to accountability; equity of work-load; and variation of impact. In just over one-fifth of these written comments, concerns were raised about specific aspects of governance relating to the management of the school.

The issues raised by parents and staff in the questionnaires and communication received by the ETI were discussed with the principal and governors.

Key findings

Overall, the attainment for pupils at GCSE or equivalent has improved. The outcomes for pupils achieving five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-C has moved from being well below the Northern Ireland (NI) average to in line with the NI average for similar schools; the attainment gap of the pupils entitled to free school meals at this measure has decreased from ten percent in 2015/16 to one percent in 2017/18. Over the last two years, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics has also increased from being significantly below to in line with the NI average for similar schools. However the attainment of the pupils entitled to free school meals at this measure remains well below the NI average for similar schools.

The proportion of pupils attaining grades A* to C in three or more subjects at GCE A level or equivalent continues to be significantly below the NI average for similar schools; this is a significant area for improvement.

The staying on rate from year 13 to year 14 remains significantly below the NI average for similar schools and has declined further since the initial inspection; in 2017-2018, it was almost thirty percent below the NI average.

The school recognises the need to review the curricular provision for those pupils who are returning to study at post-16 level. Furthermore the school has identified that while pupils are attaining in two A-levels or equivalent, there is a need to monitor and address attainment in their third subject. Timely and appropriate careers education, information and guidance that is well connected to the curricular review and planning is necessary for those pupils transitioning from key stage (KS) 4 to post-16 to ensure they make well informed appropriate decisions that will allow for them to progress to the next stage of their education or into the work place.

Over the last two years the pupils have attained high standards in GCSE English language which are well above the NI average for similar schools. Over the same period, the pupils' outcomes in GCSE English literature have remained below the respective (NI) average for similar schools. A small number of pupils study A-level English; over the last two years, the proportion of pupils attaining grades A* to C has been significantly below the NI average. Standards in GCSE and A level English literature remain an important area for improvement, noting that the school has now reviewed the entry policy at KS 4.

The standards attained by the pupils in GCSE mathematics, although an improving trend, are still well below the NI average for similar schools; GCE A level mathematics are significantly below the respective average, with a varying degree of success in results and the uptake is low. A number of strategies and interventions across key stages 3 and 4 are focused on improving: the quality of provision; the outcomes attained by the pupils at KS4 and post-16; and the uptake at post-16.

The number of pupils entered for GCSE level in a modern languages since the time of the inspection has remained low; however the KS 3 provision has been restructured with a focus on improving future uptake at KS 4. The attainment of the small number of pupils in Irish in 2017 and 2018, at GCSE level grades A* to C, is in line with the NI average. The small number of pupils who were entered for Spanish GCSE in 2017 attained at grades A* to C; there were no entries in 2018. There are currently a very small number of pupils studying both languages at post-16.

Performance and pastoral data is being used increasingly to inform target-setting for pupil and to share with parents, information on the pupils' progression. There is an ongoing commitment by leadership to providing professional development opportunities for staff aligned to the priorities within the school development plan, including learning and teaching and developing the effective use of ICT across the school. The school development plan is now compliant, with associated action plans for the key priorities.

Across senior leadership and middle management work has been undertaken to improve working relationships; a staff well-being team has been established recently. The school has been focused on relationship building initiatives within and beyond the school community, including for example, the Rights Respecting Schools Award. At both senior and middle leadership level, there is a continued need to address variation of impact in taking forward the school improvement agenda.

The school continues to prioritise matters in relation to child protection and safeguarding. The safeguarding team has been extended and a code of conduct for staff has been implemented.

Representatives from the board of governors who met with the inspectors are informed about the actions the school has taken and the progress made in relation to the areas for improvement since the time of the original inspection. The governors need to continue the process to clarify and agree the roles and responsibilities of leadership at all levels in the school, including permanent appointments to key posts of responsibility, to ensure stability in the leadership of the school.

The pupils who met with the inspectors spoke positively about their experiences in school. They highlighted the very good relationships they have with the staff and value the academic and pastoral support they receive from them. Some of the older pupils expressed concerns about subject choice and the need to be better informed to make appropriate subject choices for future career pathways.

Owing to action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the impact of actions taken and the extent to which the significant areas for improvement have been addressed, namely to:

- improve the quality of planning, teaching and assessment, including in the discrete provision for English, mathematics and modern languages;
- review and improve the curriculum offer and access to better meet the abilities, interests and career aspirations of the pupils;
- review and clarify the roles and responsibilities of all post holders to better align with school development planning, support more effectively staff development needs and develop more robust self-evaluation practices;
- develop appropriate and effective lines of communication in all aspects of the work of the school, and to commit fully to the development of an ethos that values openness, transparency, mutual respect and consultation; and
- improve the effectiveness of strategic leadership at all levels at leading and bringing about school improvement.

Consequently, there remains a need for De La Salle College to address urgently the significant areas for improvement⁴.

Conclusion

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by the teachers, the ETI is unable to assure parents/carers, the wider school community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the pupils. This will be reflected in future inspection activity.

⁴ The Department of Education will seek assurance from the Education Authority and employing authority that they are working with the school in relation to the inspection report.

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