

Report of a Pilot Baseline Inspection of the
post-16 provision in Ballymoney High School

March 2024



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ballymoney High School is a controlled, non-selective, co-educational post-primary school located in the town of Ballymoney. Its post-16 provision was established in September 2023, following the approval of the development proposal (DP) 626*.

Throughout the report, where text is accompanied by an asterisk, this indicates that additional information can be found in Appendix 2: Notes.

The pupils attending Ballymoney High School come from the town and a wide catchment area in North Antrim. Enrolment has increased by 12% in the last two years, from 647 pupils in 2021/2022 to 726 currently. There are 40 pupils enrolled in year 13 of the new post-16 provision. Almost all (39) of the year 13 pupils have stayed on to continue their education after successfully completing their GCSE studies at the school. A small number of the year 13 pupils require additional help with their learning.

The school is a member of the Ballymoney Learning Community (BLC). At key stage (KS) 4, the pupils are able to undertake a wider range of GCSE subjects* through collaboration arrangements with Our Lady of Lourdes High School and Dalriada School, two of the BLC partner schools situated in the town. Approximately 15% of KS 4 pupils are currently undertaking subjects through the BLC collaboration. At post-16, the school's partnership with Dalriada School has enabled pupils to undertake three A level subjects* not currently delivered at the school: digital technology, geography and music. Through collaboration with Northern Regional College (NRC), A level psychology is delivered in the school and a BTEC* in construction is delivered at NRC's Coleraine campus. The BTEC qualification in sport is delivered by an external provider, Eye4Education*.

As a requirement of the approval for the post-16 provision, the Department of Education (DE) has commissioned the Education Authority (EA) to: conduct an annual review of the curriculum offer at post-16 for a minimum five-year period; provide bespoke EA support to facilitate collaboration, particularly with Dalriada School at post-16; and initiate a comprehensive independent evaluation of the operation of the sixth form including numbers, curricular offer, outcomes for pupils and overall quality of provision.

Additionally, DE requested that the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carry out a baseline inspection of the post-16 provision in Ballymoney High School during its first year of operation and subsequent follow-up inspection(s) as required. Prior to the pilot baseline inspection of the post-16 provision in March 2024, the ETI completed an initial monitoring visit in October 2023.

B. VIEWS OF PUPILS AND STAFF

Inspectors met and spoke with pupils from year 12 and year 13 in five focus groups and spoke with pupils from year 13 during their classes. The year 12 pupils reported that they are well informed about the subjects being offered for study at post-16 in September 2024. The year 13 pupils expressed their pride in being the first cohort of sixth form pupils in Ballymoney High School. They also expressed their appreciation of the pastoral and academic support provided by their teachers.

Inspectors also met with staff involved in the delivery of the post-16 provision. They spoke enthusiastically about their own professional development as a result of the provision being established. They welcome the opportunity to extend their own expertise and subject knowledge from KS 4 into post-16. They recognise their need for further upskilling in the year ahead as they prepare to teach year 14 for the first time.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

During the pilot baseline inspection of the post-16 provision, the ETI worked alongside the senior leaders and staff to consider how well the school:

- has identified and articulates its vision for the school, including the post-16 provision;
- is prioritising actions to achieve the vision;
- is overcoming the main challenges it faces;
- is monitoring and reviewing progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- is growing and developing an inclusive community of learning.

The arrangements for child protection were evaluated.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The whole-school values articulated as REACH (Respect, Equality, Aspire, Commitment, Honesty) underpin the vision for the school and the intent of the new post-16 provision; that is, to be of a sufficient size to be self-funding, financially viable and achieving high-quality outcomes.
- The curriculum for the post-16 provision is being developed in partnership with Dalriada School under the auspices of the BLC and also in collaboration with the NRC, as well as through delivery by an external provider. This curriculum development is not yet sufficiently flexible, equitable or accessible to all of the pupils.

- The senior leaders have identified limitations with the current partnership and collaboration arrangements. They are reviewing, with the support of the EA, the curriculum planning and the delivery arrangements with its BLC partner school, the NRC and the external provider for the 2024/2025 academic year.
- The planning, teaching and assessment for learning were effective in the lessons observed. The strategies for learning and teaching were well matched to the pupils' needs and abilities.
- The programme of staff professional learning underpins the priorities identified by the school for the development of the post-16 provision. This professional learning is impacting positively on the staff's capacity to plan for and deliver the post-16 curriculum and qualifications.
- The pupils report that they feel safe and cared for and they know who to go to if they have any concerns about their safety or wellbeing. Communication between the head of sixth form, the sixth form supervisor and the pupils is a strength and greatly appreciated by the pupils. These supportive working relationships have enabled them to settle quickly and confidently to post-16 study.
- In discussions with the inspectors, the year 13 pupils recognised their responsibility as role models and leaders for younger pupils. This aspect of the pupils' social development is at an early stage and, in going forward, the school needs to implement its planned programme for enrichment at post-16 and monitor its effectiveness.
- The cycle of assessment and feedback, including regular reporting to parents, helps to motivate the pupils to stay up to date with their work and assignments. The pupils' success is celebrated appropriately in school, for example through regular publications on the school's website and social media channels.
- A new sixth-form facility has been created which is a welcome addition. It will not accommodate the current cohort of 40, as well as an anticipated second cohort of a similar size in September 2024.
- The arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Areas for action:

- greater collaborative planning by the school with its BLC partner school, the NRC and the external provider and supported by the EA, to design and timetable the post-16 curriculum to ensure that it is sufficiently flexible, equitable and accessible to all pupils; and

- full implementation of the school's planned programme for enrichment at post-16 and for senior leaders and other relevant staff to monitor its effectiveness.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The school's vision is for Ballymoney High School to become an 11 to 18 school open to all year 12 leaving the school, and other schools, who wish to return to or enrol at the school to study at post-16. The intent is to provide an accessible pathway for pupils who wish to continue their education at post-16 in the school and to provide a valuable asset to the whole Ballymoney community. The whole-school REACH values underpin the vision for the school and the intent of the new post-16 provision.

This vision is shared by all members of the school community, including the board of governors who worked closely with the senior leaders to draw up the case for change* for the development proposal. In keeping with the Ministerial priorities in relation to area planning of 2016*, the school's intent is for the post-16 provision to be of a sufficient size to be self-funding and achieving high-quality outcomes.

The governors' consistent and practical support for the senior leaders and teaching staff has been an important element in the establishment of the new provision. The planning for the growth of the post-16 provision needs to be developed further and articulated more clearly, to include the development of a suitably broad and balanced curriculum within a sustainable sixth form.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The senior leaders worked at pace to provide an initial curriculum which could be responsive to the pupils' preferences and career aspirations. From an original offer of 13 subjects, 12 subjects are being delivered. Within these 12 subject areas, 16 different qualifications are being delivered to meet the individual pupils' needs and abilities, including: A level qualifications in science equivalent to one or two A levels; BTEC qualifications in health and social care equivalent to one or two A levels; and BTEC qualifications in sport equivalent to one, two or three A levels.

In this first year of the post-16 provision, the school has identified limitations in the delivery arrangements with its BLC partner school and the NRC. For example, as a result of timetabling clashes, a minority of pupils are unable to attend all lessons each week with their peers. A significant proportion of the timetabling clashes arose when pupils requested late subject changes which did not align with the option blocks used to design the curriculum. The school responded positively to these requests, with adaptations to their timetables to minimise clashes. They also provided additional short-term aids, including one-to-one teacher support as required, regular catch-up sessions, and shared online learning and teaching materials, including audio recordings of lessons.

The senior leadership team is working together with other senior leaders within the BLC and NRC, alongside the EA, to put in place a more strategic and flexible approach for the further development of the school's post-16 curriculum as it progresses into its second year and beyond. Ongoing monitoring of all aspects of the provision has enabled the senior leaders to identify necessary improvements to the transition process between year 12 and year 13. A significant aspect of this enhanced transition is re-structuring how prospective pupils choose subjects, in particular through the curriculum design and structuring of the option blocks.

The planning, teaching and assessment for learning was effective in the lessons observed. The pupils are motivated to learn and engage readily in both theory and practical sessions, where they communicate their understanding in oral and written responses and demonstrate their development of practical and thinking skills. The teachers' planning focuses appropriately on meeting the learning needs of the pupils. The strategies for learning and teaching are well matched to the pupils' needs and abilities. The pupils are provided with useful feedback on what they are doing well, what they need to do in order to improve their work and how best to manage their study time in order to meet deadlines for assignments and coursework.

Ballymoney High is accredited by the EA as a Level 2 TAKE 5 School*, in recognition of its commitment to whole-school wellbeing. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils reported that they feel safe and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or wellbeing. They report that they are informed about keeping safe through presentations at assemblies and through visits by guest speakers. A kindness workshop for year 13 pupils led to a kindness week being adopted in the school for all year groups. Communication between the head of sixth form, the sixth form supervisor and the pupils is a strength and is appreciated greatly by the pupils. The enrichment and pastoral programmes for post-16 are in development. As the provision develops, it will be important to continue to use the effective channels of communication between the head of sixth form, the sixth form study supervisor and the pupils in planning further for a bespoke sixth form pastoral programme, with the preventative curriculum at its core. The pupils should also have an even stronger voice in articulating the vision for the growth of the post-16 provision.

New sixth-form accommodation has been created with the support of the EA and is a welcome addition. It will, however, not accommodate the current cohort of 40 pupils, as well as an anticipated second cohort of a similar size in September 2024.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The small number of pupils who require additional help with aspects of their learning are supported well to work alongside their peers. The pupils' individual education plans identify clear targets to help them make appropriate progress and manage their own learning. The teachers use a range of strategies to support their academic and social development. These include practical help for the pupils to organise their work more effectively and make better use of time in class and in study.

The year 13 pupils benefit from timetabled careers education, information and guidance which is complemented by a range of additional supports, including: careers interviews and 'mock' academic interviews, with advice on interview technique; attendance at careers conventions and college and university open days; and personalised career planning. In discussions with inspectors, the pupils report that they are well informed about the next stage of their education or employment. They are aware of the courses they would like to take up after school and the entry requirements to progress to these courses.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The pupils spoke positively about the progress they are making in their learning: they know how well they are doing in each subject. They are given informative feedback and encouragement to realise their potential, including through: their outcomes in regular assessments, one-to-one support in class, and oral and written guidance on how to improve the quality of their work.

To ensure that the pupils have the best chance of success, a criterion for enrolling at post-16 is that they have at least five GCSE grades A*-C, including English and mathematics. Almost all of the pupils have attained at this level and are studying three A level subjects or equivalents.

The cycle of assessment and feedback, including regular reporting to parents, helps to motivate the pupils to stay up to date with their work and assignments. These robust reporting arrangements enable teachers to monitor closely the pupils' progress and to provide early interventions if required. To date, the attendance rate for pupils at post-16 is almost 92%.

The whole-school values are reflected in the year 13 pupils' roles as wellbeing ambassadors and peer mentors, notably supporting pupils in year 8. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils recognised their responsibility as senior members of the school to act as role models for younger pupils; they are eager to take on greater responsibility within the school community. There are opportunities for the pupils to take on leadership roles as prefects and, on a rota basis, as members of the school council. The school also promotes the Volunteer Now programme which has involved a group of year 13 pupils in greater community action.

Academic, sporting, cultural and other successes are celebrated in displays in school, on the school website and through social media channels. The annual prizegiving ceremony is complemented by, for example, termly celebrations of success and annual arts showcases for parents. Pupils are also awarded honours ties in recognition of their achievements in the arts, citizenship and sports.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

There is sharing of practice within and between subject departments involved in delivering the post-16 provision; this has been fostered by the positive working relationships of staff throughout the school. The programme of staff professional learning underpins the identified priorities for the development of the post-16 provision; it is impacting positively on the staff's capabilities within their curricular areas and subjects for planning, teaching and assessment. Appropriately, the senior leaders and governors have made time available to the teachers to plan and prepare resources.

Teachers have attended online and face-to-face agreement trials with the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and other examination boards in order to familiarise themselves with the curricular content and standard required for the specifications set at A level or equivalent. In addition, they have been pro-active in forging informal links with, and learning from, teachers in other schools who have more experience of delivering the subjects at post-16. In order to prepare for the first cycle of Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applications, the teachers involved have accessed support from sixth form staff in the neighbouring Dalriada School.

There are good links with local businesses, particularly in providing pupils with work experience placements. The school is also developing closer links with local primary schools. As part of the course, all of the year 13 pupils studying the level 3 large size sport qualification, which has an equivalence size of three A levels, undertake placements to provide regular coaching sessions to children in the local primary schools.

Staff from the EA Youth Service deliver the Learning Together Programme* and provide bespoke support for pupils at KS 3 in the school. As a result of this close working relationship, almost all of the young people in the town participating in the accredited Horizons leadership programme facilitated by the Youth Service come from the school's year 13 cohort.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the pilot baseline inspection of the post-16 provision, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance. The safeguarding team has been pro-active in updating the child protection policy, to include adult protection. This policy is being readied for ratification by the governors in time for the first intake of pupils to year 14.

4. GOING FORWARD

As the post-16 provision is currently sustainable only through collaboration, the vision for Ballymoney High School becoming an 11 to 18 school with a post-16 provision of a sufficient size to be self-funding, financially viable and achieving high-quality outcomes, requires greater collaborative planning.

Ballymoney High School, through continued work with its BLC partner schools, the NRC and the external provider, and supported by the EA, needs to design and timetable the post-16 curriculum to ensure that it is meeting the needs of all pupils.

The relevant staff need to implement fully the planned programme for enrichment which is currently under development: once established, senior leaders and other relevant staff can set up processes to monitor its effectiveness.

ETI will continue to work with the school as it takes forward the areas for further action detailed above and in the body of this report.

5. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75% - 90%
A majority	-	50% - 74%
A significant minority	-	30% - 49%
A minority	-	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

APPENDIX 2: NOTES

Page 1 [development proposal \(DP\) 626*](#)

Ballymoney High School will establish post-16 provision and increase its enrolment number from 670 to 810 with an annual phased increase, with effect from 1 September 2023, or as soon as possible thereafter.

GCSE subjects*

The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualification is available in a range of subjects.

A level subjects*

The General Certificate of Education Advanced level (A level) is a subject-based qualification.

BTEC*

BTEC stands for the Business and Technology Education Council; BTECs are specialist work-related qualifications.

[Eye4Education*](#)

BTEC Level 3 Sport (single award, double award and triple award) is delivered by an external provider, Eye4Education. The staff involved hold teaching qualifications recognised by the DE and provide similar courses in a number of other schools in NI. They have previously worked with pupils in Ballymoney High School in relation to careers guidance.

Page 4 **case for change***

The case for change is Ballymoney High School's rationale for [development proposal 626](#), to start a post-16 provision in the school.

The Ministerial statement of 2016*

The Ministerial statement of 2016 relating to area planning and sustainable schools is available at: [Ministerial Statement – Area Plan](#). The aim of the Sustainable School Policy is to have strong viable schools which provide our children with a high-quality education for their benefit, and for the benefit of society as a whole. School sustainability should first and foremost be about the quality of the educational experience of our children. The [Policy for Sustainable Schools](#) will form an important aspect of the EA's approach to area-based planning.

Page 5 Level 2 TAKE 5 School*

TAKE 5 is a programme initiated by the Public Health Agency and supported by the EA to promote wellbeing. Schools volunteer to participate in the programme. In order to progress to Level 2, schools show commitment to the Take 5 steps to the wellbeing message through a prolonged and strategic approach to implementation.

Page 7 the Learning Together Programme*

The EA's Youth Service introduced a schools programme, Learning Together, in 2014. The programme has been developed with other educational support services and is delivered in partnership with teachers in schools.

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