

Report of a Post-primary Inspection
Blessed Trinity College, Belfast

January 2025



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Throughout the report the use of an asterisk * denotes further information included at Appendix 2.

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Blessed Trinity College opened as a co-educational post-primary school in 2017, following the amalgamation of Little Flower Girls' School and St Patrick's College (Bearnageeha). The school is a member of the North Belfast Area Learning Community and currently operates on two adjacent sites. In general, pupils in key stage (KS) 3 attend the Somerton Road site, while pupils in KS 4 and post-16 attend the Antrim Road site. Additional accommodation, notably for support sessions and aspects of the post-16 provision, is available in a discrete building on Somerton Road which belongs to Holy Family parish. The school has recently been approved for a new build.

While the school's catchment area is significantly wider, most of the pupils come from North Belfast. Enrolment has increased over the last four years, rising from 1288 to 1351 currently. The school is over-subscribed for entry to year 8. Importantly for this amalgamation of two single-sex schools, the proportion of boys has risen and is now almost in line with that of girls. The school serves areas of significant deprivation and 52% (699) of the pupils have free school meals entitlement. Just over 16% (221) of pupils are identified as having special educational needs (SEN) and there are 96 pupils who have statements of educational need. Across the year groups, there are 96 newcomer pupils who come from a wide range of nationalities.

The staff's work in this wider school community has been recognised through, for example, the following awards and achievements: two discrete Families First* Awards; a Digital Schools* Award for digital wellbeing; and, for the fifth year, the Spirit of Catholic Education Award*. Blessed Trinity College has also been recognised as a School of Sanctuary* and is completing the Education Authority's Take 5* accreditation.

B. VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to pupils, parents/carers and staff in advance of the inspection.

Twenty-seven per cent (366) of the pupils responded to the online questionnaire, with 71 providing additional written comments. In their highly positive responses, they expressed their appreciation of the consistent care and support provided by their teachers, the learning support assistants (LSAs) and the care teams. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils highlighted: their participation in, and enjoyment of, the co-curricular activities; the praise and encouragement they receive from their teachers; and their strong sense of belonging to the school community.

Thirteen per cent (139) of parents/carers responded to the online questionnaire and 76 provided additional written comments which were almost wholly positive. The parents/carers commended the high quality of care for their children and highlighted, among other strengths: the approachable and helpful staff who know their children well; the extensive work of the proactive care teams*; the prompt communication between school and home; and the sensitive support provided for those who have special educational needs, or who face issues related to their wellbeing.

Almost 57% (127) of the staff responded to the questionnaire, with 32 providing additional written comments. In their highly affirmative responses, the staff expressed their appreciation of, notably: the supportive, inclusive environment for all members of the school community; the priority given to staff wellbeing; the wide range of, and encouragement to take up, opportunities for professional learning; and their sense of being valued and trusted as professionals.

A summary of the questionnaire responses, including any issues raised, was shared with the principal and two of governors.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) worked alongside Blessed Trinity College to consider how well the school:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The school's vision for the pupils to '**Be here, Be you, Belong**' is infused in all aspects of school life and is embraced by the pupils.
- The senior leaders' extensive consultation with the whole school community informs effectively the school's improvement planning process.
- The engaging collaborative continuous staff professional learning is aligned closely to the school's priorities for improvement and impacts positively on the pupils' holistic development.
- The planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning is mostly effective.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and flexible at key stages 3 and 4. At post-16, the pupils require access to more general subjects and senior leaders need to review the one-year course for a significant number of pupils.
- The use of an unqualified teacher to teach one subject within the KS 4 curriculum is not in line with the [Department of Education's Circular 2023/07](#).

- The early intervention strategies promote well the pupils' health and wellbeing, including digital safety.
- The entire school community is highly effective in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and every pupil is embraced and cherished by the staff.
- The pupils' positive attitudes to learning and their interpersonal skills are reflected well in their attendance, engagement, motivation, courtesy, optimism, self-confidence and positive interactions with staff and each other.
- The pupils relish how their success is celebrated widely across and beyond the school.
- Strategically planned collaboration with external agencies is supporting well the pupils to overcome barriers to their learning and is enhancing their learning experiences.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child and adult protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Areas for action:

- to continue to improve the consistency in the quality of planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning; and
- to keep the post-16 curriculum provision under review, including the one-year course for a significant number of pupils; and address the deployment of an unqualified teacher at KS 4.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

At the time of the amalgamation in 2017, the vision of 'Achieving Excellence Together' highlighted the importance of unity in achieving the best possible outcomes for the pupils. As the identity of Blessed Trinity College became more strongly established, and through consultation with key stakeholders, a new vision statement was agreed: '**Be here, Be you, Belong**'. This vision articulates concisely three key principles for the pupils: the importance of attendance and being in school to learn; the unique value of every pupil, of all abilities, from all backgrounds and nationalities; and the whole-school family where everyone has a place and is welcomed. This affirmative message is infused in every aspect of school life and embraced by the pupils. To develop further their ownership of the vision, the pupils took the school's initial letters, BTC, to reflect everything they aspire to '**Be**', the range of '**Top**' elements in their school lives and all the ways in which '**Caring**' is demonstrated throughout their school community.

This vision is underpinned well by six core values of '**Aspiration and Expectation; Care and Inclusion; Respect and Responsibility**' which are not only visible on the school crest and signage, but also embedded throughout the school. The senior leaders and staff are committed to living out these values by setting clear expectations of the pupils and encouraging them to aspire for more. The values of care and inclusion are realised through the work of the care teams, the whole-staff commitment to the pupils' wellbeing and the school's welcoming, pupil-centred ethos. The relationships between pupils and staff are characterised by mutual respect and a shared understanding of their respective responsibilities for learning and teaching.

The school development plan (SDP) and associated action plans articulate clear and appropriate priorities for development, which are informed well by honest feedback from the whole school community, combined with internal data and outcomes from public examinations. As a result of this process, senior leaders evaluate accurately the progress being made against the key targets and identify the next steps in ongoing improvement.

The governors have recently been re-constituted. In discussion with inspectors, the governors demonstrated clearly their commitment to the pupils' wellbeing and progress, their understanding of the improvement work already under way and their role in supporting the school community. The school will benefit from the governors' contribution to addressing the areas for action detailed in this report.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning is mostly effective. The lessons are consistently characterised by mutually respectful, positive working relationships. When the learning was most successful, key features included: inspirational, purposeful learning with high expectations of all pupils; tutorial-style approaches in which the teacher facilitated meaningful independent and group learning; the promotion of the pupils' critical and analytical skills; and mature, confident debates. The teachers use effectively a range of assessment for learning strategies and constructive, detailed written and verbal feedback which help the pupils improve the quality of their work. The pupils provide honest evaluations of their own progress which inform well the next stages of the teachers' planning.

In the lessons where the learning is less effective, there is over-direction by the teacher and an over-reliance on worksheets, with the result that the pupils are not challenged sufficiently and their skills, including oral communication, are underdeveloped. Adaptive strategies, including differentiation and challenge, are not used to full effect. The SDP prioritises appropriately the need to gather first-hand evidence of learning and teaching in the classrooms in order to continue to improve the consistency in the quality of planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning across the school through staff professional learning (SPL) and the inspection endorses this.

The pupils benefit from a broad, balanced and flexible curriculum at KS 3 and KS 4, supported by a wide co-curricular programme. The appointment of an unqualified teacher delivering one subject in the KS4 curriculum does not comply with the [Department of Education's Circular 2023/07](#). Senior leaders and governors need to address this issue to ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged by interim arrangements. At post-16, pupils access a small number of additional subjects through collaboration within the North Belfast Area Learning Community. Currently, there is an imbalance of applied and general subjects at post-16, with the curriculum weighted towards applied subjects.

The pupils told us how well informed they are to make important subject choices and decisions at transition points. They benefit from a series of well-planned information days, including the 'Dream Big Day'* careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) fair for year 10 pupils and informative teacher podcasts which pupils at all stages, and their parents/carers, can access. The taught careers provision is delivered through the employability element of the Learning for Life and Work (LLW) specification in KS 3 and supplemented with one discrete period of careers in year 10. The school has identified appropriately the need to: improve CEIAG in years 8 and 9 which will be effected through the employability strand of LLW; and extend the provision across the school to enhance the pupils' knowledge and understanding of potential pathways to the next stage of their education or employment.

A key strength of the school is the strategic provision of the proactive approaches to promote the pupils' health and wellbeing, including digital safety. The care teams, along with all staff, implement a range of early intervention strategies to prioritise the pupils' wellbeing and importantly, to attend school. For pupils facing challenges, the impact of this work is life transforming. The preventative curriculum equips the pupils well to make informed decisions about managing risks; they are well aware of how to safeguard themselves and others in school and beyond. The delivery of the preventative curriculum is enriched through the extensive community partnerships that provide up-to-date practical and experiential learning opportunities to equip the pupils to face life challenges with confidence. The views of pupils, staff and parents/carers, combined with community information, are used effectively to ensure that urgent and relevant issues are addressed promptly.

Through the outworking of a well-considered relationships and sexuality education policy, the pupils benefit from understanding how to promote healthy friendships and relationships through positive thinking. For example, the school piloted an empowerment programme to equip the pupils with skills in assertiveness, personal safety and being alert as young adults. Appropriately, the school plans to use direct classroom observations to ensure greater consistency in the quality and impact of the pupils' experiential learning in LLW across all classes.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The entire school community is highly effective in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and every pupil is embraced and cherished by the staff. Consequently, the pupils benefit greatly from very high levels of care, compassion and support. The staff have an in-depth knowledge of each pupil's strengths, challenges and personal

circumstances. This knowledge, together with the detailed and ongoing communication between staff, pupils and their families, underpins the staff's work to support individuals and groups of pupils. The staff work sensitively and empathetically to overcome poverty as a barrier to learning, for example offering free school meals to all pupils in January and February.

The school's focus on promoting equality, diversity and inclusion enables the pupils to attain academically and develop the dispositions, skills and personal capabilities needed to live confident, happy and fulfilling lives. Pupils with SEN are supported very effectively through a highly strategic programme which combines academic support with nurturing approaches focused on developing personal and social skills, complemented by programmes facilitated effectively by external partners.

Ongoing assessment of the pupils' progress informs well their individual education plans: targets and strategies are amended regularly to enable further progress. The LSAs are highly skilled and play a crucial, and highly valued, role in meeting the pupils' needs. Their ongoing professional development is prioritised appropriately by the senior leaders and appreciated by the LSAs. The extensive work carried out in the learning support centres and in the Welcome Learning Hub* impacts positively on the pupils.

A strategic approach to supporting newcomer pupils and their families, who come from a wide range of nationalities and cultures, is enabling them to settle well, progress in their learning, in particular by developing their English language skills, and build meaningful relationships with their peers and staff. In addition, the staff's work to support the pupils' expression of their respective identities is warmly welcomed by the pupils, including the provision of a prayer space for pupils of differing faiths.

The pupils told us about the very positive impact that the staff and the provision have had on their learning and development. They reported that they feel very well supported and cared for, and that the interventions have enabled them to ensure they attend regularly, are more focused on their learning, confident in themselves and able to manage better their emotions.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The pupils relish how their success and holistic development are celebrated widely across, and beyond the school, including through engaging assemblies, awards, community events, displays and social media. They value how the staff take a keen interest in them, praising their efforts and having high expectations of what they can achieve. The pupils spoke enthusiastically to us about 'Team Trinity'* and the exciting opportunities provided through co-curricular activities, including musical and dramatic productions, debating, sports, volunteering with charities and working with local primary schools and a special school.

The pupils progress well across the key stages in the development of their wider skills, attitudes and dispositions reflected in their attendance, engagement, motivation, courtesy, optimism, self-confidence and positive interactions with staff and each other. The staff know the pupils extremely well through analysing qualitative and quantitative data to monitor pupil progress from their individual starting points. Using a wide range of pastoral and academic interventions and strategies, most pupils are achieving well.

In 2024, most (88.4%) of the year 12 pupils who attained five GCSE (or equivalent) qualifications at grades A* to C achieved in line with their ability. The school is focused appropriately on: improving further the proportion of pupils (53.7%) attaining five GCSE (or equivalent) qualifications at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics; and reducing the gender gap at this measure, with boys outperforming girls. As a result, specific groups have been identified as performing below the school's internal targets, in particular in GCSE mathematics, and the school has put in place a range of academic and pastoral programmes to support individual pupils going forward.

Another key focus is the further development of the pupils' resilience in year 13 to enable them to complete their post-16 qualifications; in 2024 a significant minority left at the end of year 13. In 2024, most of the pupils who completed year 14 and who attained three A level (or equivalent) qualifications at grades A* to C achieved in line with their ability. There is a small number of pupils who take three years at post-16 to complete three A Level (or equivalent) qualifications. It will be important for the school to keep the post-16 curriculum provision under review to ensure that all pupils achieve and progress in line with their ability and aspirations. This review should include the numbers of pupils enrolled in the one-year 'step-up' programme* and the proportion of these pupils attaining GCSE qualifications at A* to C in mathematics and English.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The school has fostered a highly effective community of learning for all. Linked appropriately to the priorities in the SDP, there is a strategic approach to continuous SPL, including through the responsive in-school Aspiring and Emerging Leadership programme for staff at all levels. Staff told us about the positive impact of SPL on their own practice, the opportunities to learn from colleagues in their own and other departments and their appreciation of the senior leaders' support. The processes and associated resources are well designed to enable staff to reflect on their practice, recognise genuine strengths and identify the next steps in their own professional development.

There is a well-planned induction programme to welcome pupils moving from primary school, through regular communication, staff visits to the relevant primary schools and a programme of events to engage new year 8 pupils. The pupils' sense of belonging continues after leaving the school, with past pupils giving back to the school community by engaging with pupils at, for example, CEIAG events and inspiring them to be the best that they can be. In addition, a high number of past pupils also return to the school as LSAs and teachers.

The long-standing strategic links with external agencies, including local youth service providers and mental health initiatives, enrich the learning experiences of the pupils, support the development of their communication and leadership skills and assist them in overcoming the barriers they face. Through engagement with agencies offering outdoor learning activities, pupils are exploring and learning about their local area. In addition, through the well-planned use of external youth services, the pupils can link with their local youth clubs and engage further in purposeful non-formal learning. The pupils' connection to their community beyond the school is also extended through a number of initiatives such as musical performances in local care homes. The pupils benefit from opportunities to understand and appreciate other perspectives through various trips and links with other local and cross-border schools. It is now timely to consider extending further connections with local schools through a Shared Education* partnership.

The school monitors and reviews robustly all initiatives supported by external agencies to evaluate the programmes and adapt them to the specific needs of specific cohorts of pupils. The impact of these interventions on the pupils includes better school attendance, improved behaviour, increased learning, reduced need for contact with parents/carers regarding concerns and the development of the pupils' resilience.

The school community is effectively extended to include parents who benefit from such initiatives as the Parent Environmental Wellbeing Project* which helps parents/carers connect with one another. In addition, the school supports parents/carers through hosting events to signpost families to additional agencies within the area which can offer bespoke support for a range of issues they and their children may be facing beyond the school.

F. CHILD AND ADULT PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child and adult protection align to the current statutory guidance. The pupils told us that they feel safe in school, and there is always someone they can speak to if they have any concerns.

4. GOING FORWARD

Blessed Trinity College's vision and values are infused in all aspects of school life and have a demonstrable impact on the pupils' holistic development. The entire school community is highly effective in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and providing the pupils with very high levels of care, compassion and support. Within this vibrant community of learning, the pupils experience academic, personal, social, sporting and cultural success.

The ETI, through the engagement of the district inspector, will continue to work with the school as it takes forward the areas for action set out in this report.

Inspectors identified an aspect of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspects of practice which should be shared more widely include: the proactive, preventative strategies to promote the pupils' health and wellbeing, including digital safety; and how well the strategically planned collaboration with external agencies supports the pupils to overcome barriers to their learning and enhances their learning experiences.

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** **The Families First Awards** for Education, Healthcare, and Charity and Business awards cover a broad spectrum of industries that service the family sector. The awards celebrate those that go over and above what's expected.
- Page 1** **The Digital Schools Awards** is a national awards scheme to promote, recognise and encourage a whole school approach to the use of digital technology in schools.
- Page 1** **The Spirit of Catholic Education Awards** celebrate the outstanding work taking place in Catholic schools to ensure that the Catholic ethos is being actively promoted and that pupils' faith development is at the centre of school life.
- Page 1** **A School of Sanctuary** is a school that has received a Sanctuary Award from City of Sanctuary UK or a partner organisation in recognition of its good practice in fostering a culture of welcome, belonging and solidarity for those seeking safety.
- Page 1** **Take 5** is a programme initiated by the Education Authority (EA) in Northern Ireland that aims to improve the health and wellbeing of pupils and their communities, following the Public Health Agency's Take 5 model, which provides five steps to help with mental and emotional health.
- Page 1** **Care Teams** consist of an assistant vice principal, a head of year, an assistant head of year and the form teachers.
- Page 5** **Dream Big Day** is the title given to the school's careers fair as its aim is to raise the pupils' aspirations of future careers, notably through presentations by former pupils in many different areas of further and higher education, training and employment.
- Page 6** **Welcome Learning Hub** provides additional learning & examination support for our newcomer students, to promote & enhance inclusion, accessibility, progression & achievement. The Welcome Learning Hub is also the location for our newcomer Parent Hub meetings which take place on a termly basis.
- Page 6** **Team Trinity** is the overall title of the school's co-curricular programme.

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The Step-up programme is for pupils in year 13 to enable them: improve on their grade in English and mathematics GCSE; study a level 2 course not already taken in KS4; and participate in work-related learning experience. Currently there are 45 (21%) year 13 pupils enrolled in the step-up programme, one-third of whom transferred from a range of post-primary schools in the local area. Over the last two years most of the pupils in 'step-up' the programme progressed to further education, employment or training; only a small number achieved a GCSE qualification at A* to C in mathematics and a significant minority in English.

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Shared Education is a policy initiated by the Department for Education in Northern Ireland. It involves two or more schools, or pre-schools or youth organisations, working together to provide opportunities for children and young people from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds to be educated together.

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The Parent Environmental Wellbeing Project offers parents/carers an opportunity to engage in a range of activities including walking, gardening and cooking to meet other parents/carers and about strategies to promote their wellbeing.

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