

Report of a Post-primary Inspection  
Kilkeel High School

November 2024



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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Kilkeel High School is a controlled, co-educational, all ability 11-18 school situated in the coastal town of Kilkeel. The school attracts pupils from a wide catchment area. Enrolment in the school has increased in recent years and stands currently at 759 pupils, including 136 pupils in the sixth form.

Around 14% (108) of the pupils have free school meals entitlement and 16% (120) of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN), with 38 pupils having a statement of SEN. The school has 23 newcomer pupils from a diverse range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The school has a longstanding shared education partnership with St. Louis Grammar School.

## **B. VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS AND STAFF**

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

Fifteen per cent of pupils (117) across all year groups responded to the questionnaire and the responses were generally very positive. Almost all pupils reported that they are treated with care and respect and that their achievements and talents are recognised and celebrated by the school. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils spoke very positively about their school experiences, the support provided by the staff and their appreciation of the opportunities provided to them.

Just under one-quarter of parents/carers responded to the questionnaire: these responses indicated high levels of satisfaction with the work and life of the school. Nearly all reported that their child is happy in school and making good progress in their learning. The parents are appreciative of the opportunities provided for their child to learn beyond the classroom, through for example, educational visits and external speakers.

Almost one-half of the non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaire and their responses were very positive. All are clear about the school's vision and almost all indicated they had benefitted from professional learning opportunities including opportunities to share their skills and expertise with others.

A majority of the teachers (82%) responded to the questionnaire: these responses were highly positive. All are clear about the school's vision and their contribution to achieving it and almost all feel their views are sought after, valued and acted upon.

Additional written comments were provided by 19 pupils, 43 parents and 25 of the staff; many expressed positive views about aspects of school life. All these views, including the written individual concerns which referenced matters such as safety, teaching and accommodation, were discussed in detail with senior leaders and representatives of the governors.

## C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside Kilkeel High School 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 of **Creating Opportunities, Realising Potential, and Developing Individuals**, underpinned by the shared values of kindness, honesty and success, is being implemented very effectively.
- The depth of the pupils' kindness to one another and the staff is palpable across the school.
- The strong culture of valuing pupils' rights and the participation of all is underpinned by meaningful consultation and collaboration; the pupils' views are used well to inform aspects of learning and teaching and broader school decision-making.
- The pupils benefit from high quality classroom experiences and their learning is enhanced by a wide range of enrichment and leadership opportunities.
- The pupils access a well-planned and evolving curriculum which is informed by their abilities, aspirations and views.
- The staff have a clear understanding of the additional needs faced by pupils and use a range of effective strategies to help them overcome any barriers to learning, develop communication skills and grow in confidence.
- The pupils in the learning support centre (LSC) benefit from the opportunities to learn alongside their peers in other classes.
- The school gives a high priority to promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils and staff.
- The pupils' successes are celebrated through a wide range of creative approaches and the pupils readily share and celebrate the successes of others.

- The school's work to date on developing a community of learning is a key strength.

Area for action:

- to continue to review the post-16 provision so that all subject pathways, option choice combinations and outcomes meet fully the progression and career aspirations of all pupils.

### **3. MAIN REPORT**

#### **A. SETTING THE VISION**

The school's vision of Creating Opportunities, Realising Potential and Developing Individuals, which is based on the Christian faith and underpinned by the values of kindness, honesty and success, is being implemented very effectively.

Significant work has been undertaken by the governors, senior leadership team, staff and pupils to enable the vision and values to be shared, understood and enacted by the wider school community. This work includes: the revision of the school leadership structure; the creation of improvement plans and staff professional learning to strengthen relationships across the school to benefit the pupils' learning and development.

The values of kindness, honesty and success are understood across the school community and reflected well in the high expectations for each pupil and the positive way in which members of the school community interact with one another with empathy, courtesy and respect.

Through the school's well-developed processes for self-evaluation, the senior leaders and staff have identified key priorities for improvement. The aspects being developed, such as relational learning and adaptive teaching, are linked closely to the school's vision. Consequently, the work to implement the vision is highly effective.

The governors are highly committed to the school's vision, values and Christian ethos. They have a comprehensive understanding of the school's context, are very supportive of the staff and lead, guide and challenge as appropriate. The governors are highly strategic in their thinking and are setting a clear direction for the school, which is focused on achieving the best learning experiences and outcomes for all of the pupils.

#### **B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION**

Aligned to the school's aims, the pupils enjoy positive interactions with each other and with staff. They are self-confident, friendly and courteous. As they progress through the school, they develop effective employability skills, including punctuality, high standards of personal presentation, teamwork and leadership skills. They exercise initiative to help one another, the staff and those in the local community and beyond. The pupils spoke to us about how they value honesty, especially in learning from mistakes, decisions and behaviours. The depth of the pupils' kindness to one another and the staff is palpable across the school.

The school gives high priority to promoting the health and wellbeing of the pupils and staff, as evidenced by the supportive learning environment and ongoing staff professional learning. In keeping with the school's core values, pupils are encouraged to carry out acts of kindness and partake in charitable activities which support the health and wellbeing of others. Most recently, the school has raised funds for Mourne Stimulus and for Air Ambulance Northern Ireland. The school has arrangements in place to train all pupils in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and during the inspection a group of year 8 pupils engaged maturely and successfully in this important first aid training. The pupils are empowered to make informed decisions to control risk in life beyond school, including road and farm safety.

The school is reviewing and developing aspects of the preventative curriculum and the outworkings of the relationships and sexuality education policy following consultation with the pupils and parents/carers.

The pupils benefit from high quality learning experiences as a result of staff professional learning and self-evaluation. The pupils' digital skills are developed well through the discrete provision of information and communication technology at key stage (KS) 3. This bespoke programme is aligned strategically to the pupils' starting points to support progression in the pupils' learning and equips the pupils with digital skills for their independent learning across the key stages, including using the school's digital learning platform and others.

A wide range of learning, teaching and assessment strategies enable the pupils to progress well in their learning and development. Key features of the effective practice observed included well-paced, stimulating and challenging activities to engage the pupils actively in their learning. These lessons fostered well the pupils' sense of curiosity and critical thinking skills through real-life contexts, practical investigations and creating games. A key strength is how the pupils are encouraged to take ownership of their learning through self-management skills, and self and peer evaluation to improve their work. The pupils explained to us the differing ways they have learned to consolidate their learning through thinking diagrams, voice recordings, visual cues and asking each other questions.

The pupils access a well-planned evolving curriculum which is informed by their abilities, aspirations and views. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of sporting, cultural and other opportunities; educational visits, work-related experiences and charitable endeavours which develop well the pupils' sense of social responsibility. At KS 3, the pupils experience a broad curriculum. At KS 4, the curriculum offer exceeds the requirements of the Entitlement Framework. Going forward, a review of the suitability of the English and mathematics qualifications at GCSE level, for a small number of pupils, will support them in accessing their courses of choice when they leave school. In addition, the ongoing review of the post-16 provision needs to ensure that all subject pathways, option choice combinations and outcomes meet fully the progression and career aspirations of all pupils.

Discussions with the pupils indicated that they have a clear understanding of the range of career pathways and opportunities available to them through their effective careers education, information, advice and guidance. The pupils value their access to external speakers and the perspectives of local employers, businesses and others which helps them make informed decisions. Leavers' destination information at years 12 and 14 is gathered, analysed and used well to monitor the pupils' career progression beyond the school.

### **C. BUILDING EQUITY**

There is a well-planned induction for pupils entering year 8, including a residential trip, which enables the pupils to make friendships and start their new school with confidence. Through close links with the feeder primary schools, a wide range of assessment and pastoral information is shared to help identify pupils who may need support with their learning.

The staff have a clear understanding of the additional needs faced by the pupils and use a range of effective strategies to help them overcome any barriers to learning, develop communication skills and grow in confidence. As the pupils move through the school, ongoing assessment and the views of subject teachers are used well by staff to review accurately the pupils' progress and inform the next stages of support. The individual education plans have clear targets for pupils with SEN and include practical guidance for teachers and parents to help the pupils to progress academically and develop skills and strategies to manage their emotional wellbeing and develop their self-esteem. The pupils also benefit from support provided by a range of external agencies.

The Learning Support Centre (LSC) is a valuable and much-valued aspect of the school's provision. The pupils in the LSC benefit from the fluid movement between their lessons in the LSC and opportunities to learn alongside their peers in other classes. Flexible timetables, the effective support of classroom assistants and access to a well-equipped sensory room, when required, are instrumental in helping pupils manage their own emotions and stay engaged in education.

To help pupils throughout KS 3 overcome any barriers to reading and to mathematics, sixth form 'reading champions' and 'maths champions' work with pupils during morning registration. In addition, sixth form pupils support younger pupils in other subjects during the day. These interactions enable the KS 3 pupils to approach their learning with greater confidence and forge friendships with senior pupils.

The staff are proactive in fostering positive attitudes to literacy and numeracy through, for example, literacy-themed morning registrations, the use of the central library and class libraries, and encouraging pupils to participate in mathematics and writing competitions. The school pays appropriate attention to pupils with dyslexia; teachers have been trained appropriately and provide suitable resources to help pupils read, interpret and manage subject-related information.

The school's inclusive ethos is evident in the effective integration of pupils from a wide range of nationalities and cultures, including those from Eastern Europe, Africa and the Far East, all of whom give the school a tangible global dimension. The leadership have invested strategically in language and social support for these pupils which enables them to access the curriculum, progress in their learning and build friendships with their peers. Ongoing educational trips enrich the pupils' appreciation of diversity and broaden their perspectives on, and experience of, the wider world.

#### **D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS**

The school's vision and values inform the holistic and creative approaches to defining, celebrating and embedding success. There is a broad definition of success, which includes the pupils' progress from their starting points and their achievements in cultural activities, sports, and importantly, in demonstrating the school's values. The pupils are encouraged to work hard and give of their best.

The school knows the pupils and their families very well and makes extensive use of data including pastoral information and standardised assessments to establish the pupils' starting points and monitor the progress made. The pupils are achieving success in public examinations; in the last academic year, most (81%) gained five or more GCSE (or equivalent) qualifications at grades A\* to C and 73% achieved five or more GCSE (or equivalent) qualifications at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics. The school's internal data shows that the pupils, including those with SEN, achieve in public examinations in line with their abilities and the school's expectations.

The pupils are encouraged to take part in competitions and external events and experience high levels of success in sporting, cultural and other activities at local, regional and national level. Of particular note is the school's achievements in hockey and football. The pupils' successes are recognised and celebrated through a wide range of creative approaches and the pupils readily share and celebrate the achievements of others.

The staff have agreed simple, yet very effective, strategies to reward punctuality, engagement and behaviour. The inspection team witnessed great excitement among KS 3 pupils who had been rewarded with a lucky ticket to win a mystery prize.

Importantly, success is also measured by how well the pupils demonstrate the school's values. In assembly, the pupils celebrated enthusiastically their peers who received awards in recognition of their kindness, honesty and success. The pupils who won awards were very proud to be added to the 'hall of fame' which celebrates the wide range of successes of current and former pupils both in and outside school. A number of pupils told the inspectors about their delight in receiving an award and expressed how important it was to them.



## **E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING**

While the school has long-standing links and partnerships, the leadership has placed a high priority on, and developed a strategic approach to, growing the school community; this is being implemented effectively. The school has developed a clear understanding of what is meant by 'community' to include pupils (present and past), families, staff, other schools, churches, local businesses and charities and those further afield. Significant work has been undertaken to date, and comprehensive planning is in place, to develop further this important dimension of the school's work.

The school has a longstanding shared education partnership with St Louis Grammar School. During the inspection, around 60 pupils from the two schools were involved in a residential programme; pupils from Kilkeel High School told the inspection team that they were looking forward to taking part in the programme and had made friends with pupils from their partner school.

The strong culture of valuing the pupils' rights through the participation of all is underpinned by meaningful consultation. Staff professional learning about trauma-informed and restorative practices and managing behaviour is empowering the pupils to make informed decisions both independently and collaboratively. Through the school council, pupils are enabled to put forward proposals and suggest solutions; their views are acted upon and used well to inform decision-making that leads to school improvement. The 'Pupil Personal Reviews' provide pupils with an opportunity to share their views on any aspect of school life with their form teacher.

The embedding of the school's vision is evident in the opportunities provided for continuous learning for all, and staff value highly the collaborative opportunities to learn from one another. The impact of well-planned staff professional learning on adaptive teaching strategies and relational learning is evident in the very positive learning environments where pupils know that they are valued highly, their needs will be met, and their views are important in informing teachers' planning.

The staff benefit from the focus on their wellbeing and managing stress which is informed by their ideas on how to foster team building experiences.

This community of learning is enhanced further by the opportunities provided for pupils to understand and appreciate global perspectives through the school's international links, for example, through the many trips and exchanges and the celebration of the diverse cultures of the pupils.

## **F. CHILD 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 who met with inspectors reported that they feel safe and well cared for in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their wellbeing.

## 4. GOING FORWARD

Kilkeel High School's vision of **Creating Opportunities, Realising Potential**, and **Developing Individuals**, underpinned by the shared values of kindness, honesty and success, is being implemented very effectively.

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

Inspectors identified an aspect of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspect of practice which should be shared more widely is the value placed on the pupils' participation rights; the pupils' views are used very effectively to inform school improvement.

## 5. APPENDIX

### 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%

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