

Report of a Post-primary Inspection
St Joseph's Boys' High School, Newry

December 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

St Joseph's Boys' High School is a maintained, non-selective 11-16 school situated in Newry City. The school attracts pupils from the city and surrounding rural areas. Just over one-third of the pupils come from the three most economically deprived electoral wards in the Newry and Mourne District Council. The current enrolment is 394. Forty-four percent of the pupils have free school meals entitlement and 28% (109) have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN), 56 of whom have a statement of SEN. Twenty percent of the pupils (78) are newcomers.

B. VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS/CARERS AND STAFF

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

Forty-four percent (174) of the pupils across all year groups responded to the online questionnaire and their responses were very positive. All of the pupils said that they benefit from lessons that equip them with life skills. Almost all of the pupils indicated that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, treated with care and respect and enjoy school. A minority of pupils provided additional written comments in which they highlighted the supportive staff who provide them with excellent help and want the best for them and the very positive, respectful relationships that they have with their teachers.

Eight percent (30) of parents/carers responded to the questionnaire and a small number of them provided written comments. All the parents/carers indicated that they know about the school's vision and aims, their child is happy at school making good progress and benefiting from learning beyond the classroom. Almost all of the parents/carers are happy with their child's learning experiences in the school; they are content with the quality of teaching and support provided and would recommend the school to other parents/carers. In the written comments, the parents/carers commended the caring, committed, approachable staff who go beyond and above to support the pupils and the excellent communication with the school.

Seventy-five percent of the teaching staff (21) and 66% (23) of the support staff responded to the questionnaire and their responses were highly positive. All of the staff have ownership of the school vision, feel valued and respected and enjoy working in the school. A small number of staff also provided additional written comments which highlighted the warm welcoming atmosphere in the school, their enjoyment of going to work every day, the respectful boys and the way they work well together to provide the best for the pupils.

A summary of the questionnaire responses, including suggestions for improvement and any individual concerns, were shared with the principal, the chair of the board of governors and the designated governor.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside St Joseph's Boys' 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 permeates all aspects of school life; the school motto, "**Vir Justus,**" embodies the concept of being a just, honourable man, as reflected in the life of St Joseph, is embraced fully and lived out by the pupils.
- The pupils are respectful and welcoming, they demonstrate empathy and social justice through acts of kindness to others; the senior pupils develop leadership skills through planning and organising the school's charitable work.
- The planning, teaching and assessment were mostly effective, pupils benefit from well-planned opportunities to learn together in purposeful, real-life contexts linked to their interests. The school has identified the need to develop further strategies to engage the pupils in their learning more consistently across the school.
- The nurturing and inclusive learning environment throughout the school supports well the pupils' health and wellbeing; equipping the pupils to make informed choices, reduce any potential risk and keep themselves and others safe.
- Most of the pupils attain very well at GCSE level; the school is focused appropriately on improving further the number of pupils attaining five GCSE qualifications (or equivalent) at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, to support all pupils to progress successfully to education, training or employment.
- The whole school community is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion as reflected in the work to meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and those who require additional assistance with aspects of their learning and development.

- The pupils in the learning support centre (LSC) benefit from the opportunities provided to develop their personal and social skills and learn well when involved in active, practical activities.
- The curriculum is flexible and responsive to the pupils needs; the pupils benefit from innovative, creative partnerships with local businesses that support them to transition successfully to the next stage of their learning or employment.
- The well-planned careers education, information, advice and guidance, (CEIAG) including purposeful work-related learning at key stage (KS) 4 supports the pupils well in making informed decisions about future pathways matched to their interests and abilities.
- Staff professional learning (SPL) is aligned well to the priorities in the one-year interim school development plan (SDP) and is having a positive impact on the pupil's learning experiences.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Area for action:

- to develop further and embed successful strategies on how boys learn best across the school, to bring about a greater consistency in the quality of learning experiences provided for all the pupils.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The school's vision "**to build positive relationships based on respect that fosters quality learning for all,**" permeates all aspects of school life. The vision is evident in the inclusive ethos and the very positive, respectful relationships throughout the school. The school motto, "**Vir Justus,**" which is rooted in the biblical portrayal of St Joseph and embodies the notion of a just, honourable man, is fully embraced and lived out by the pupils. The pupils who met with inspectors were able to articulate clearly their understanding of the school vision and what it takes to be a "**just honourable man**" in St Joseph's Boys' High School and beyond.

The pupils are central to the life and work of the school which is reflected in the one-year interim SDP that guides well the work of the school. The priorities and associated action plans are informed through honest self-evaluation and the school has appropriate processes in place to monitor the impact of actions to bring about improvement. Going forward, the school is aware of the need to move to a three-year SDP with action plans linked better to the existing assessment information.

The governors are well informed about the current opportunities and challenges facing the school. They value the support of the local community, including collaboration with other schools, as they strive to do their best for the pupils and their families.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The pupils are very loyal to, and immensely proud of, their school. They are respectful, welcoming, caring and compassionate to others, irrespective of their background.

The planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning was mostly effective. Aspects of the whole-school focus on how boys learn best are reflected in the well-planned opportunities for the pupils to learn together in real-life contexts taking account of their interests, which builds their confidence and develops well their social skills. The teachers' skillful questioning extends the pupils' thinking and responses to help them deepen their understanding and enhance their learning.

When the learning was less effective, the focus was on imparting knowledge and the intended learning was unclear.

As the school continues to develop and embed the successful strategies to engage boys successfully in learning, it will be important to ensure greater consistency in the learning experiences provided for the pupils.

The pupils are nurtured in a welcoming and inclusive learning environment which supports well their health and wellbeing. The in-house weekly staff pastoral clinic facilitates the sharing of information, advice and guidance so that staff can provide targeted and timely pastoral support for pupils and their families. The pupils show empathy and compassion towards the health and wellbeing of others and demonstrate social justice through volunteering in the community and fundraising to support local charities.

The preventative curriculum, including the provision for relationships and sexuality education, is responsive to relevant and contemporary issues and enhanced through meaningful collaboration with others. We joined an information session with the Youth Service and the Police Service of Northern Ireland where the pupils engaged maturely and sensitively in learning about consent, the impact of one-punch violence and the consequences of inappropriate online behavior, such as sharing images and catfishing. In our discussions with pupils across all year groups, they reported that they are supported well to make informed choices to keep themselves and others safe, and they know how to access support if needed.

The school's monitoring and evaluation, including consultation with staff, has identified the need for more SPL to support more effectively the delivery of personal development across the curriculum.

The curriculum is flexible and responsive to the needs of the pupils. While the school does not meet the Entitlement Framework requirements, the current subject offer at KS 4 meets the needs, aspirations and abilities of the pupils. The school's ongoing review of the curriculum is focused appropriately on monitoring the range of subjects provided for the pupils and the number of qualifications taken by them to support them to transition successfully to post-16 education, training or employment.

The well-planned CEIAG programme supports the pupils in making informed decisions about progression pathways and is enhanced by purposeful opportunities for work-related learning. A key strength of the provision is the cognisance taken of the local labour market demands to increase opportunities for the pupils to avenues of future employment. The pupils benefit greatly from innovative, creative partnerships with local businesses to develop their understanding and increase their awareness of future career pathways available to them. These well-developed partnerships also help the school to understand better the skills, attributes and qualifications sought after in industry, and assists them in providing relevant, appropriate courses for the KS 4 pupils. The pupils who met with inspectors said they value the broader learning opportunities provided by the school's collaboration with a range of organisations and businesses that help them to make informed decisions about a range of appropriate pathways, including the post-16 provision in local schools, further education, training and employment.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The whole-school commitment to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion is reflected in the significant work undertaken to meet the needs of pupils who have SEN and those who require additional assistance with aspects of their learning and development. During the inspection, high levels of care, compassion and empathy were evident in the words and actions of the pupils and the staff.

Key pastoral and SEN staff collaborate effectively to support the pupils. Significant work has been carried out to develop the links with feeder primary schools, so that the pupils' starting points are established and clearly understood. The 'pupil profiles', which include qualitative and quantitative information, support well the staff in knowing the pupils and inform planning for learning. A strength of the individual education plans for pupils with SEN is the high level of consultation with the pupils and their parents/carers.

The classroom assistants play a valuable role in supporting pupils; their skills are utilised well to provide additional sessions for the pupils such as the homework clubs, booster sessions and 'nurture through nature'. The pupils benefit from support facilitated by external partners such as the Education Authority's SEN behaviour support team, Southern Health and Social Care Trust personnel and other organisations, who work to support the pupils' learning and address any barriers they may face.

The pupils in the LSC benefit from the opportunities provided by the school to develop their personal and social skills and learn well when involved in active, practical activities. The school has worked hard to enable the pupils in the LSC to access appropriate routes to further study or employment; the school's data indicates that the pupils in the LSC make good progress and access appropriate pathways at the end of KS 4.

The pupils who have English as an additional language are supported very effectively in class and through the afterschool club, in which they access bespoke assistance for their specific needs.

In line with the school's ethos, the work to support pupils who experience socio-economic disadvantage is sensitive and empathetic. The staff work very effectively to address poverty as a barrier to learning.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The pupils are happy to share their successes and those of their peers. In discussions, they stated their appreciation of the small, yet meaningful, gestures by the staff to acknowledge their efforts. They highlighted their enjoyment of class trips which celebrate their success, allow them to try out a range of activities and develop new skills. The staff expressed their delight in the pupils' successes in sport, drama and participation in cultural events. The success of all pupils, current and former, is celebrated in displays throughout the school and shared on social media platforms.

The pupils are encouraged to have a go and embrace new learning; the highly inclusive approach to developing the pupils' interest in, and development of, music skills is reflected in the opportunity for all junior pupils to progress at their own pace and experience success in playing a musical instrument. The pupils singing and instrumental skills observed during the Christmas carol service were excellent.

In 2024, most (75.3%) of the year 12 pupils attained five GCSE qualifications (or equivalent) at grades A* to C and the majority (52.1%) attained five GCSE qualifications (or equivalent) including English and mathematics, which is in line with the school's expectations and the pupils' ability. The school is focused appropriately on improving further the number of pupils attaining five GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics at grades A* to C. The school's analysis of its internal data indicates that the pupils with SEN make good progress in their learning.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

There is a powerful sense of belonging to the St Joseph's school community among the pupils, staff, governors and parents/carers. The school values working in partnership with parents/carers to support the pupils' learning and development and welcomes their views to inform school improvement.

Through collaboration with local schools, the pupils enjoy working with others and developing new skills; the younger pupils told us about the fun they had participating in a céilí with pupils from other schools. The pupils in the student council develop leadership and communication skills; they work successfully as a team to organise whole-school fundraising events to support vulnerable members of their community.

The school values and understands the importance of ongoing SPL to meet the range of needs of the pupils. The SPL is aligned well to the priorities in the interim SDP and is having a positive impact on the pupil's learning experiences.

The highly effective strategic approach to, and rationale for, external collaboration with others, notably local businesses and enterprises, impacts positively on the pupils' learning, knowledge and skills development. Through such links, the school has secured sponsorship, additional funding and resources to enhance and extend the learning experiences for the pupils.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

4. GOING FORWARD

St Joseph's Boys' School is achieving its vision successfully in **“building positive relationships based on mutual respect.”** The staff strive to provide **“quality learning for all”** in an inclusive environment, where the pupils are valued and nurtured to become decent, “just and honourable” young men.

Inspectors identified aspects of highly effective practice from which others may learn. The aspect of practice which should be shared is the innovative and very successful partnerships created with local business that support and enrich the pupils learning.

The ETI, through the work of the district inspector, will continue to work with the school as it takes forward the area for action identified in 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: SMALL SCHOOLS

In all post-primary schools where the enrolment number is below the minimum number of 500 in years 8 to 12, as set out in the Department of Education's [Sustainable Schools Policy](#), it will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

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