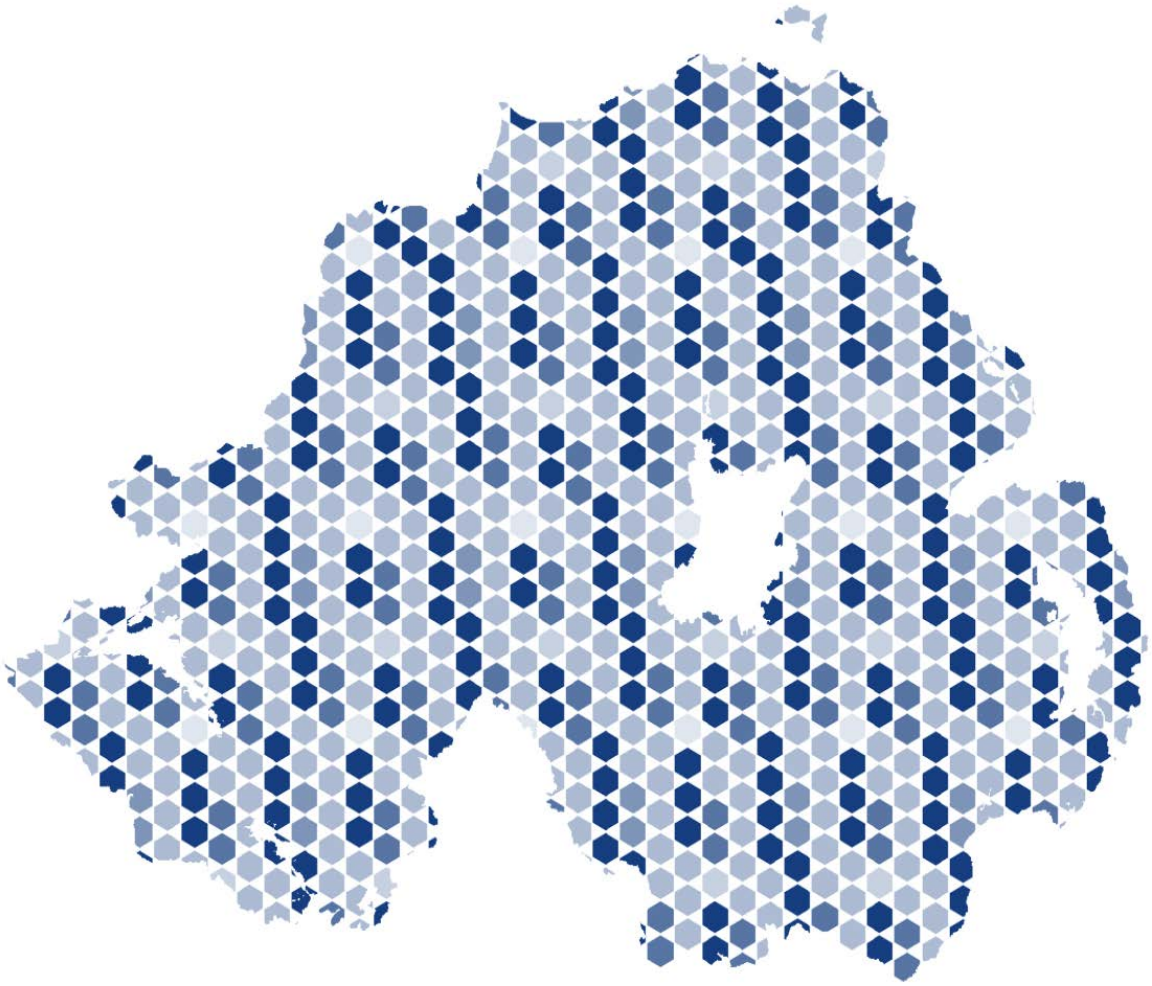
Education and Training Inspectorate

POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Antrim Grammar School, Antrim

11-18 co-educational controlled grammar school DE Ref No 341-0209

Report of a Sustaining Improvement Inspection in May 2019

The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:
Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE CSE

Sustaining Improvement Inspection of Antrim Grammar School, Antrim (341-0209)

Introduction

The previous inspection in April 2016[1] evaluated the overall effectiveness of Antrim Grammar School as demonstrating the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the pupils. Since the last inspection, a new principal has been appointed and the senior leadership team (SLT) has been re-structured. A development proposal to increase the intake of pupils to year 8 has been approved and the total enrolment is rising steadily. A sustaining improvement inspection (SII) was conducted in May 2019.

Focus of the inspection

The purpose of the SII was to evaluate the extent to which the school is capable of demonstrating its capacity to effect improvement through self-evaluation and effective school development planning. The school also provided evidence of provision for safeguarding as part of the inspection.

The lines of inquiry during the SII were the school's actions to:

- raise the standards attained by the pupils in public examinations, in particular at GCSE grades A* to B and at post-16, through promoting greater consistency in learning and teaching; and

- embed a whole-school pastoral programme which addresses explicitly the development of the pupils' leadership, organisation, resilience, initiative and communication skills.

Key findings

- The school development plan articulates clearly the key priorities for improvement and sets out practical actions and robust processes to monitor and evaluate the progress made against the targets. There have been strategic appointments to lead the improvement work. Through well-planned staff development which fosters a shared understanding of good practice, the school has been addressing inconsistencies in learning, teaching and assessment identified at the time of the last inspection. All of the lessons observed during the SII were good or better, with most being very good. These lessons were characterised by excellent working relationships, the teachers' realistically high expectations of the pupils and the pupils' purposeful engagement in learning.

- In the period since the last inspection, the school has addressed successfully the variability in individual GCSE subject performance. Over the last three years, the pupils' outcomes in almost all of these subjects at grades A* to B, and A level subjects at grades A* to C[2], have been in line with, or above, the respective Northern Ireland (NI) averages. The proportion of pupils attaining three or more A levels, or equivalent, at grades A* to C has risen by more than ten percentage points and, in two of the last three years, has been in line with the average for similar schools[3]. Notably, there has been a significant improvement in outcomes in all science subjects at both GCSE and A level.

[1] https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/post-primary-inspection-antrim-grammar-school
[2] In those subjects for which there are corresponding NI subject averages.
[3] In the same free school meals band.

- Central to the school's positive approach to the pupils' care and welfare is the sustained, effective focus on building character as the foundation for personal development and success at all stages of life. A notable innovation at Key Stage 3 is the introduction of a well-structured reward system which enables staff to acknowledge the pupils' demonstration of leadership, organisation, resilience, initiative and communication skills. There is an extensive range of opportunities for pupils at all stages, both in timetabled lessons and through the extra-curricular programme, to take on leadership and organisational roles, make presentations to different audiences and grow in confidence. The evidence presented during the SII indicates that pupils at risk of disengaging from school have benefited from being encouraged to work in teams and take on whole-school responsibilities.

- In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils articulated a mature understanding of the importance of character development and expressed their appreciation of the school's positive approach to behaviour, complemented by the opportunities provided to develop such important skills as resilience and self-management. They value the approachable staff who provide effective academic and pastoral support when it is needed.

Safeguarding

During the inspection, the school provided evidence that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflect the guidance from the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils reported that they feel safe and secure in school; they know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

Conclusion

Antrim Grammar School continues to demonstrate the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the pupils. The ETI will continue to monitor how the school sustains improvement.

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