



## **Markethill High School**

### **How self-evaluation and planning impacts on improved educational outcomes**

Markethill High School is an 11-16 non-selective co-educational school situated in Markethill, County Armagh. The current enrolment stands at 525 pupils. A submission has been made to the Department of Education for the development of a sixth form and a new build.

This case study focuses on the school's ability to effect improvement through self-evaluation and school development planning and the consolidation of quality teaching and learning with improved educational outcomes.

In October 2013, the school had a standard inspection in which achievements and standards, provision for learning and leadership and management were each deemed to be very good, contributing to the same overall performance level. ETI commented, "the school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement."

This was followed by a Sustaining Improvement Inspection in May 2017.

#### **Sustaining improvement**

The outcomes of this inspection highlighted "highly strategic leadership", collegial staff approaches and "the development and consistent implementation of a school-designed, research-informed approach to classroom practice."

The report highlighted the steady improvement in GCSE outcomes and the "narrowing of the gender gap" with the proportion of pupils achieving five or more passes, including English and maths, at grades A\*- C as "significantly above the average for similar schools."

The school's analysis and use of data was commended highly as was the fusion of the academic and the pastoral. The findings evidenced a school that continued to demonstrate a "high level of capacity for sustained improvement".

The school's results in 2017 reflect this sustained improvement.

### **Improvement in educational outcomes**

The Principal noted a record GCSE pass rate in 2017 with almost 95% of pupils attaining five or more GCSE passes at A\* - C. This is over 20% higher than the Northern Ireland average of 74.4% for non-grammar schools. Over 92% of boys achieved five or more passes at A\* - C while the equivalent Northern Ireland average is 81%.

The improved outcomes are due to several factors including the development of a culture within the school in which high expectations are set for pupils and their teachers. There is a clearer understanding of the elements that make up a successful lesson with a sharper focus on pupils' learning.

A revised learning and teaching policy was produced in 2015, followed by a revised assessment and feedback policy in 2017. Both form the core of all of the school's work.

The school is outward-looking in its endeavours to seek the best in pedagogical developments, and regularly sends staff to visit other institutions to observe what it considers to be excellent practice, most recently the Michaela School in Wembley, London, and Great Yarmouth Charter Academy.

### **Continued professional development**

Improved outcomes along with improved learning and teaching have been underpinned by a whole-school investment in the professional development of staff. In 2015, the school introduced the research lesson study (RLS) model to supplement the existing PRSD system.

This has created a horizontal structure which has led to greater professional discourse on learning and teaching, heightened awareness of misconceptions in learning and robust strategies to deal with these.

Staff work together to co-create lessons and the emphasis is directly on the learning as opposed to the teaching. The outcome has been greater staff collaboration coupled with an increased understanding of the challenges in the design, delivery and evaluation of good lesson practice. Teachers use research and evidence to inform future planning. Observation of lessons is constructive and informative.

The school's focus on 'how' pupils learn is based on current educational research. Staff commitment is evidenced in the postgraduate study of staff members and the uptake, by 13 staff, of in-house twilight middle management training for aspiring and current middle leaders in 2016.

**High aspirations for all**

Markethill High School has very clearly shown “its capacity for sustained self-improvement”.

There is a clear vision of high aspiration for each pupil which is shared by the school community and communicated effectively by leadership and Governors.

This has informed planning and actions which are continuous, cohesive, inclusive and developmental, resulting not only in improved outcomes but in increased professional discourse with a focus on learning in the classroom.

**For further information, please contact:****Markethill High School**

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**The Controlled Schools’ Support Council.**

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