



Lisneal College

Strengthening ethos to improve attainment

Lisneal College is an 11-18 co-educational school located in the city of Londonderry. This case study focuses on the emphasis on strengthening the school's ethos and the resulting improvement in educational outcomes.

The College entered the formal intervention process in March 2010 following an inspection conducted by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) which found the overall provision in the school to be inadequate.

The areas identified for improvement in this initial inspection included the need:

- to improve the standards achieved by pupils
- for senior management to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate provision in a more strategic and collegial way
- to review the School Development Plan and the development of an effective communication strategy and build more systematically on the work of target-setting at departmental and whole-school level.

Follow-up inspection

A follow-up inspection published in 2014 identified important improvements made in the provision and concluded that the overall quality of education was now good.

The inspection team reported that the pupils were more engaged in their learning and that there was a greater sense of order in classes.

The report also identified an improvement in the standards achieved by pupils and the quality of leadership and management throughout the school.

Since this follow-up inspection the school has continued to develop a culture of success. It aimed to target the raising of standards as a whole-school priority, particularly the standards achieved by boys.

A sustaining improvement inspection (SII) was conducted in 11 May 2017. The key findings of the inspection were:

- The percentage of the pupils attaining five or more GCSE or equivalent qualifications at grades A* to C has improved significantly, and is now well above the Northern Ireland average. The outcomes attained by the pupils in GCSE English have similarly improved. At post-16, the outcomes attained by the pupils have been above the Northern Ireland average for two out of the last three years.
- The improved outcomes are a result of the improving capacity of the school to undertake self-evaluation leading to improvement, including the targeted use of assessment data to raise the expectations of pupils and teachers, and to identify the need for interventions to further support the pupils' progress in their learning.

Academic success

The most recent GCSE results indicate that the school has made significant strides in improving results.

The number of Lisneal pupils achieving five GCSE qualifications, or their equivalent, at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics is 63.9%, which demonstrates a steady improvement of 23% over a three year period (2015 -2017). This is 14% above the Northern Ireland average for non-selective schools.

The corresponding figure for pupils entitled to free school meals (FSME) improved by 33% to 64.1%, making it now nearly 26% above the Northern Ireland average of 38.5% for non-selective schools.

The figure for boys achieving five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A*-C is 18.5% above the Northern Ireland average of 45.3% for non-selective schools. The corresponding figure for FSME boys is 65.2%, and this is 31% above the Northern Ireland average for non-selective schools of 34.2%.

There is no one thing that helped the school realise its target; rather it was a combination of factors.

Enhanced perception of the school

The first priority was to enhance the perception of Lisneal College both within the school and the wider community.

There was a need to re-instil pride in the school and an aspiration to achieve. The principal visited a variety of local community groups to talk to their management about the school and what it could offer in the community.

A number of these community centres now operate extra English and maths classes for pupils.

Core values: The Lisneal College 6 (LC6)

A change of culture was required within the school with all staff demonstrating a consistent approach to pupils outside and inside the classroom.

After a comprehensive consultation with pupils, staff, parents, governors and community representatives, six core values were chosen that are representative of the school's ethos.

The Lisneal Core Values (LC6) of *teamwork, respect, integrity, responsibility, aspiration* and *fairness* form the basis of the school's pastoral and reward system. The form classes in years eight and nine have also been named after each one of these values.

By keeping the ethos visible and alive each day, pupils are encouraged to promote and champion each core value. They understand what the school represents within the school and the wider community.

Positive relationships

A highly supportive pastoral system has developed positive relationships at the school. The pupils, in particular boys, are treated with respect which is reciprocated. The pastoral system develops a culture of aspiration at every level which is reinforced by a programme of targeted intervention including mentoring support and additional tuition.

Small groups of pupils at the school who were at risk of disengaging with the academic curriculum were identified and a specific programme, Learning Together, was put in place to encourage them to re-engage and set personal goals including the achievement of five or more GCSEs.

Learning Together has allowed the school to target disaffected pupils and provide them with a relevant teaching programme to help them deal with the pressures presented at home and at school, alongside developing their skills of communication, team-work, and self-development.

The programme is co-delivered by the school and the youth service and gives pupils the opportunity to achieve a level two qualification in pastoral success and well-being, equivalent to a GCSE at grade B.

The process has allowed many pupils to re-engage with their education and become more connected to their learning. Outdoor elements of the programme have given them further opportunities for personal growth.

Learning Together plays a significant part in raising aspiration and consequently to the raising of standards. The most recent cohort, made up of boys, all achieved five GCSEs at grades A*-C.

Parental engagement

Throughout the school the pupils' parents are actively engaged in their children's learning through a programme aimed at reconnecting them with the school in a pro-active manner. For

example, parents are encouraged to meet with their child's teachers at an informal breakfast morning and discuss openly the work they are doing.

This is much more interactive than normal teacher/parent evenings as teachers take the time to explain the work and how parents might support learning at home.

Parents are also kept informed about the life and work of the school through the effective use of social media. A key element of this is to celebrate the success of individual pupils no matter how small that success may be to some.

Developing effective leadership and management

Finally, and importantly, school leadership is more active in their challenge and support role throughout the school day. The hard work of the teachers and leadership throughout the school has managed to create a very different atmosphere from that identified by ETI in 2010.

This was recognised in 2014 but there has been significant progress since then which has resulted in a more positive ethos and can-do attitude amongst staff and pupils.

The school is aware that there is still much to do. There is a need to consolidate the gains achieved and to also raise the level of the girls' attainment to match the gains achieved by boys. A focus is also being placed on outcomes at post-16.

This lack of complacency and willingness of the whole staff to engage in a process of self-evaluation and to address the issues identified for development is key to the school's continued improvement.

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