Report of a Post-primary Inspection

Rainey Endowed School, Magherafelt

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Education and Training Inspectorate
Empowering Improvement

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1. Introduction

A. Background information

Rainey Endowed School is a co-educational 11-18 voluntary grammar school in Magherafelt. It was founded in 1713 as part of the legacy of Hugh Rainey, a benefactor, in the Magherafelt district. The current enrolment is 760 pupils. The pupils who attend the school come from Magherafelt and a wide geographical area across Mid-Ulster and beyond. There is a broadly mixed religious profile within the school community, drawing pupils from controlled, maintained and integrated primary schools. Around 6% (44) of the pupils have free school meal entitlement and 11% (86) have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN), 27 of whom have a statement of SEN.

The school is an active member of the Area Learning Community, referred to as the Magherafelt and Rural Learning Partnership (MRLP). As a result, 11 pupils access a small number of post-16 courses through collaboration with four local post-primary schools. Similarly, a small number of pupils from three other local post-primary schools access post-16 courses in Rainey Endowed School. Pupils in key stage (KS) 3 and KS 4 take part in shared education projects with all of the schools in the MRLP, and there are joint approaches to aspects of staff professional learning (SPL).

B. Views of pupils, parents and staff

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

The responses to the questionnaires are referenced, where relevant, within the main body of the report. A high-level summary of the questionnaire responses, including any concerns raised, was shared with the principal and six representatives of the board of governors.

C. The process of inspection

The ETI worked alongside Rainey Endowed 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 define, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. Main Report

A. Setting the vision

Rainey Endowed School's vision, **'The Rainey Way',** is lived out successfully through its motto, **Sal Sapit Omnia** (**salt savours all**). The vision fosters a distinctive ethos that enhances the individual talents of its pupils, staff and the wider community through preserving and living out its core values of **respect**, **responsibility** and **resilience**. The impact of this strong ethos was reflected in the responses to our questionnaires, where almost all (96.1%) of the pupils and all of the staff reported that they are proud to belong to this school, and almost all (94.8%) of the parents/carers would recommend this school to others.

The school's ethos is intertwined through the tailored and widely consulted upon school development plan (SDP), now in its second year. The SDP priorities of developing pupils as **successful learners**, **confident individuals** and **responsible citizens** demonstrate clear alignment between the school's vision and its core values, providing coherence and strategic direction across the whole school. The associated action plans are well-aligned, appropriate and well-constructed; they support the effective implementation of school improvement and promote consistency in practice. The staff evaluate accurately the impact of their work through a well-embedded culture of self-evaluation, including the use of a wide range of first-hand evidence.

The governors are very passionate about and committed to '**The Rainey Way**'. They are highly invested in the everyday life of the school, including volunteering in weekly practical activities, such as sports coaching and wider support. The governors' well-established committee structure provides robust oversight of the school's strategic priorities and key areas of provision. Through regular engagement with staff, governors gain a secure understanding of the school's progress and emerging priorities. Their commitment and hands-on approach contribute significantly to its ongoing success.

B. Implementing and improving to achieve the vision

The school's robust planning for learning encapsulates '**The Rainey Way**', which allows the school's vision, values and high expectations to be visible and lived out through the pupils' highly positive behaviours and engagement in lessons. The planning for learning is well informed by the SDP and reflects priorities around learning and teaching and SPL. All the planning connects well and is coherent and very well considered. A key strength in all of the planning documents is the way it provides strong foundations for progression in learning for all pupils.

Where teaching, learning and assessment were most successful, pupils engaged fully in individual, paired and group activities. Most pupils reported that lessons are interesting (83.6%) and challenging (79.1%), while almost all (93.5%) stated that they receive support when needed. They engage very effectively in paired and collaborative learning, posing probing questions and supporting their opinions with well-reasoned arguments. Lessons are characterised by high expectations, strong teacher subject knowledge, excellent use of time, effective scaffolding and impactful

adaptive teaching. Teachers use effective questioning and check regularly for understanding to deepen learning and encourage curiosity, discussion and the use of subject-specific language. The staff provide effective feedback and timely support, and these are key strengths of the classroom practice. Assessment and feedback are views positively by pupils; in their responses to our questionnaires, most (88.3%) of them report that feedback is helpful.

When the learning was less successful, challenge, variety and pace were more limited, resulting in fewer opportunities for the pupils to discuss their learning and resulted in dips in engagement levels. The school operates appropriately a continuous learning and teaching monitoring cycle to ensure that evidence is used effectively to identify teaching strengths, prioritise areas for SPL and evaluate the impact of actions on pupils' outcomes.

The curriculum at KS 3 and KS 4 is broad, flexible and responsive to pupils' needs and meets statutory requirements. At post-16, the range of qualifications is reviewed regularly and adapted appropriately to meet the pupils' career aspirations and to support appropriate progression pathways. In the responses to the questionnaires, most (89.9%) pupils and almost all (95.6%) parents are satisfied with the curriculum offer, while destination data shows that almost all pupils (95.8%) progress successfully to higher education, employment or training.

The school takes a strategic approach to developing digital skills across the curriculum. Through ICT and cross-curricular learning, pupils apply digital technologies in meaningful contexts. Pupil leadership strengthens provision through the school's e-safety mentorship and the digital ambassador programmes. Over the last three years, around one-half of the pupils in KS 4 have studied a digital skills qualification, and attainment in digital skills examinations remains consistently high.

A well-planned pastoral programme promotes independence, responsible decision-making and ownership of learning. The provision, including, registration classes, sixth-form pastoral mentors, mental health first aiders and wellbeing ambassadors contributes effectively to pupils' wellbeing and support. Almost all of the parental responses indicated that their child is treated with care and respect by other children (96.9%), and by teachers and other adults (99.1%).

The preventative curriculum is responsive to pupil need and addresses relevant contemporary issues. Following consultation with pupils, provision was refined further to strengthen areas, including relationships and sexuality education (RSE), examination pressure and online safety. Across all key stages, pupils are supported well to make informed choices and keep themselves and others safe. The pupils in post-16 benefit from opportunities to explore issues such as safe driving and 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' initiatives, with many of them contributing positively to their communities through volunteering.

Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is delivered through learning for life and work, careers classes and a broad programme of events. Strong links with employers provide meaningful workplace experiences and improve the pupils' understanding of progression pathways. Most pupils (76.7%) report, in their questionnaire responses, that they receive useful careers advice. The staff monitor well the CEAIG provision, and as identified in the SDP, have prioritised appropriately expanding opportunities for career-related work experience.

C. Building equity

Consistent with the school's vision of broadening educational opportunity, the staff promote inclusion and equity through responsive support, tailored to pupils' needs, abilities and interests. Positive relationships foster a strong sense of belonging, reflected in the number of former pupils who return as staff and governors. The pupils are happy, engaged and participate fully in school life. Through our online questionnaires, almost all (98.3%) of the pupils told us that they enjoy school.

The school identifies and addresses barriers to learning for pupils long before transfer from primary school. Engagement with pupils and families begins well in advance of admission, as early as year 5 in primary, and includes enhanced transition arrangements for pupils with SEN. Pupils in year 8 who met with inspectors spoke positively about their transition experiences and reported feeling very excited about joining Rainey Endowed School.

The provision for pupils with SEN reflects a detailed understanding of individual needs and supports them to develop the confidence, personal capabilities and social skills required to learn and succeed. The personal learning plans are effective and they are reviewed and refined by the staff to ensure ongoing support remains responsive. The support from the learning support assistants is matched carefully to individual need and strengthens pupils' confidence, engagement and independence. As a result of targeted SPL, staff adapt provision more confidently and effectively, improving access to learning for pupils who experience barriers to their learning.

The staff respond sensitively to the pupils' needs to support them when they are experiencing difficulties engaging with learning. The school extends its excellent inclusive and caring ethos through dedicated support initiatives, such as, a quiet room for nurture, wellbeing ambassadors to promote better mental health and the school's dedicated 'Safe Haven' staff to support pupils who experience bereavement, family illness and have caring responsibilities.

The school monitors and evaluates regularly key pastoral indicators, such as attendance, which is strong at 95.3% for 2025-26, reflecting the impact of pastoral support, regular monitoring and timely intervention. Pastoral check-ins and targeted support by the staff enable concerns to be identified promptly and addressed appropriately.

The staff reduce further the barriers to learning through bespoke initiatives such as 'REStore', which promotes equitable access to school uniform and supports sustainability. A wide range of intervention strategies, including access to additional online resources, and the judicious use of movement breaks and wellbeing exercises support the pupils' engagement, wellbeing and successful participation in learning.

D. Defining, celebrating and embedding success

The pupils are highly motivated, polite and exceptionally proud of their school. They demonstrate a strong sense of belonging and are committed to achieving their best. Friendly, confident and socially adept, they interact positively with their peers, showing kindness, respect and sensitivity towards the views and experiences of others.

All staff use very well attainment and wellbeing data to identify pupils at risk of underachieving, inform target-setting processes and implement timely interventions. Departmental targets contribute to whole-school target setting and support well the effective monitoring of pupils' progress and achievement.

In 2026, the outcomes attained by pupils in public examinations are key strengths of the school. Almost all (98.3%) pupils in year 12 attained seven or more GCSE (or equivalent) qualifications at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, notably, with a majority (70.7%) achieving seven or more GCSE (or equivalent) qualifications at grades A* to B, including English and mathematics. In the same time period, most (85.5%) of the pupils in year 14 attained three or more GCE A level (or equivalent) qualifications at grades A* to C, which is above the corresponding average for similar schools. These outcomes are in line with or above school targets and reflect high expectations for all pupils with a sustained focus on raising standards.

The school has a vibrant culture which celebrates pupils' successes across a wide range of areas and includes the extent to which pupils live out the school's core values of **respect**, **responsibility** and **resilience**. The House System makes an important contribution to school life by promoting participation, leadership and a strong sense of community. Initiatives such as the 'Dragon's Den' programme provides pupils in year 11 with opportunities to develop their teamwork and communication skills. In addition, the sixth-form enrichment programme prepares pupils effectively for life beyond school through opportunities for service and leadership within the community, including partnerships with a local care home and food bank. The extensive extra- and co-curricular and enrichment provision supports pupils in developing as **successful learners**, **confident individuals** and **responsible citizens**. Almost all (90.7%) pupils reported in our online questionnaire that the school offers a good range of clubs and activities.

E. Growing a community of learning

The pupils benefit from partnerships with employers, community organisations, support agencies and international charities. Through these partnerships, pupils develop leadership, resilience, empathy and respect, reflecting '**The Rainey Way**' in authentic local and global contexts demonstrating a strong sense of social responsibility, community contribution and global citizenship. The impact is evidenced by the involvement of most (83%) of the pupils in post-16 in voluntary service, sustained engagement across 11 community partnerships and the long-term commitment to charitable organisations, such as, Abaana.

The school has strong partnerships with families and external agencies to enhance further the provision for pupils. For example, recent requests for involvement and engagement with the Education Authority's SEND Local Impact Team have secured valuable specialist support for individual pupils to enable them to engage with their learning and make progress. Purposeful collaboration within MRLP, broadens access to a wider range of SPL, including an annual learning and teaching conference for all teachers and classroom assistants.

The pupils collaborate well, embrace diversity and value each other's views and ideas. In discussions with inspectors, the pupils told us that they are listened to by staff and that their views are valued and acted upon through a range of formal and informal mechanisms, including the school council, surveys and direct engagement with staff. A majority (61.6%) of pupils reported in our questionnaire that their views are used to decide what happens in school. As set out in the SDP, and endorsed by the inspection, the school has identified the further development of pupil participation so that they contribute to, and have increased influence on, a wider range of school improvement initiatives.

The school has a well-informed and embedded strategic framework of SPL that is aligned closely to its improvement priorities to develop **successful learners**, **confident individuals** and **responsible citizens**. Staff engagement in SPL is strong; almost all (97.5%) of the staff told us that they receive relevant SPL opportunities. It is embedded through a coherent range of approaches, including induction, mentoring, collaborative staff-led working groups, which promote professional dialogue, the sharing of effective practice and collective responsibility for improvement. Additionally, the school has a strong commitment to building staff capacity through internal professional development opportunities and support for postgraduate study, which enhances the effectiveness of self-evaluation and underpins ongoing school improvement.

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. In our online questionnaires and through discussions with us, almost all (99.9%) of the pupils told us that they feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they have any worries or concerns.

3. Next steps

Rainey Endowed School's vision is being lived out successfully through its motto, **Sal Sapit Omnia** (**salt savours all**), fostering a distinctive ethos that unites pupils, staff and the wider community through the shared values of **respect**, **responsibility** and **resilience**.

As set out in the school's current SDP, the following area for action should be taken forward by the school: to develop further pupil participation so that they contribute to, and have increased influence on, a wider range of school improvement initiatives.

The District Inspector will monitor the school's progress in addressing the area for action, as part of ETI's routine monitoring processes.

Inspectors identified an aspect of highly effective practice from which others may learn, including:

- how the vision is lived out and permeates all aspects of school life, enabling the pupils to develop as **successful learners**, **confident individuals** and **responsible citizens.**

4. 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

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