

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL INSPECTION

SENsations Nest School, Carryduff, Belfast

DE Ref No (IS104)

Report of an Inspection in November 2020



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Context

SENSations Nest School opened in 2018 and is an independent special school which caters for children who experience special educational needs arising from severe learning difficulties, and/or developmental disorders, social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties. Four primary aged children attend the school, from a wide catchment area including Belfast and County Armagh. There is additional private pre-school provision for three children, two of whom attend part-time. The Nest school has a multi-disciplinary staff with three teachers, two of whom are part-time, a part-time speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist, two behaviour therapists and an educational psychologist. The teaching staff are qualified teachers with a Bachelor of Education or a primary degree and a Postgraduate Certificate of Education.

The pupil/teacher ratio is very low. The educational psychologist leads the strategic direction of the school and provides ongoing assessments for the children. The senior teacher manages the school on a day-to-day basis, and teaches full-time on two days of the week. The two teachers each work for four days a week, and the three classroom assistants work in the school full-time.

The school is based in the countryside outside Carryduff, comprising an extended cottage and outbuildings and a large expanse of outdoor space. On the outdoor space there is horticulture equipment, an outdoor play area, a covered patio for messy play, an outdoor classroom and a storage barn. The accommodation complies with Health and Safety standards.

SENSations Nest School	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Enrolment – full-time	*	*	*
Enrolment – part-time	*	*	*
% Attendance	97%	91%	99%

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

N/A Not available

Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the learners' achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, in particular, how the school is addressing low attainment and under-achievement where applicable;
- whether the accommodation is suitable and meets health and safety standards;
- the quality of provision in the school, with a particular focus on the implementation of the procedures for safeguarding and pastoral care; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

Outcomes for learners

- The children are all at early stages of development and have ongoing extensive dynamic assessments by the multi-disciplinary staff to plot their progression and attainments against their individual targets. They are well settled, enthusiastic and enjoy their learning activities; they engaged very well throughout the sessions observed by the inspectors.
- The children are developing an appropriate range of play skills and enjoy the wide range of activities, particularly in the extensive outside spaces. They are also developing good social skills and are able to take turns, share resources and respond appropriately to requests.
- The children are able to communicate at their individual levels through various means including signing, visual communication boards, speech and gestures. They are making steady progress towards the targets in their individual education plans.
- The parents with whom the inspectors spoke are very positive regarding the progress being made by their children. They reported that their children are safe and happy in the highly nurturing environment and are developing well their skills for life.
- The parents value the quality of the extensive outside play sessions, which they report are improving immensely the health of their children. They particularly appreciate the swift support and advice they receive from staff in managing their children's behaviour.

Quality of provision

- The children are in the early stages of development, and the school provides a highly appropriate play-based curriculum which includes structured activities, sensory play and extensive outdoor play. The highly-skilled multi-disciplinary staff team work collaboratively to plan the provision and individualised support for the children with progression monitored and evaluated regularly.
- The children benefit from daily energetic outdoor physical play. The wide range of appealing interest areas includes a large, covered play area, a well-designed climbing frame and access to the school's therapy pony in an adjoining field. The indoor sensory room is spacious and well-focused on specific themes, for example encouraging imagination and relaxation in a forest-themed area.
- The learning and teaching sessions observed were of excellent quality with thorough and creative planning, appropriate structure, and exciting activities and equipment drawing on the interests and abilities of the children. The children are very skilfully supported and encouraged by the staff team of which classroom assistants form an integral part. Where the children lose focus, the staff gently redirect and encourage them back to the learning activity.

- The school has a highly supportive and caring ethos which impacts positively on the children and on their families. Members of staff respond quickly to requests by parents, enabling the school to understand the day-to-day challenges experienced by the children and their families, and encouraging and enabling them to help their child to progress their skills at home.

Leadership and management

- The strategic leadership is highly effective. It directs and informs the whole school provision, in particular the multi-disciplinary approach provided by the skilled team of teachers, assistants and therapists. In her role as chair of the management committee, the educational psychologist and proprietor of the school draws on her expertise and experience in working with children with complex and severe learning difficulties. She is informed comprehensively about the life and work of the school, and regularly teaches the children to inform further her insight to their progression. She has a good knowledge of the safeguarding and child protection policies and their outworkings.
- The day-to-day management of the school by the senior teacher is thorough and competent; collaboration involving all staff in a team approach is well embedded.
- The effectiveness of the school in meeting the needs of the children is monitored by the staff through an ongoing review of the children's programmes, the school environment and the facilities. Alongside weekly school team meetings, the wider, whole-school team meet twice each term to review the progress of the children and the effectiveness of the school provision in meeting individual needs. Parents are encouraged to contribute their views on the provision and the progress made by their children; they play a very active role in the education of their children.
- The board of trustees comprises the proprietor, senior teacher and two parents who meet twice each term and keep detailed minutes of the issues discussed and decisions made.

Safeguarding

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding learners take account of, and reflect the guidance from the Department of Education.

Conclusion

SENSations Nest School provides efficient and suitable instruction for the learners¹.

The school should be registered by the Department of Education to provide education.

¹ Education and Libraries Order (NI) 1986 Part IV 39 (1) c

APPENDIX A: Inspection Guidance

The guide to inspection of independent schools is available at:

<https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/independent-schools-inspection-guidance>

APPENDIX B: Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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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