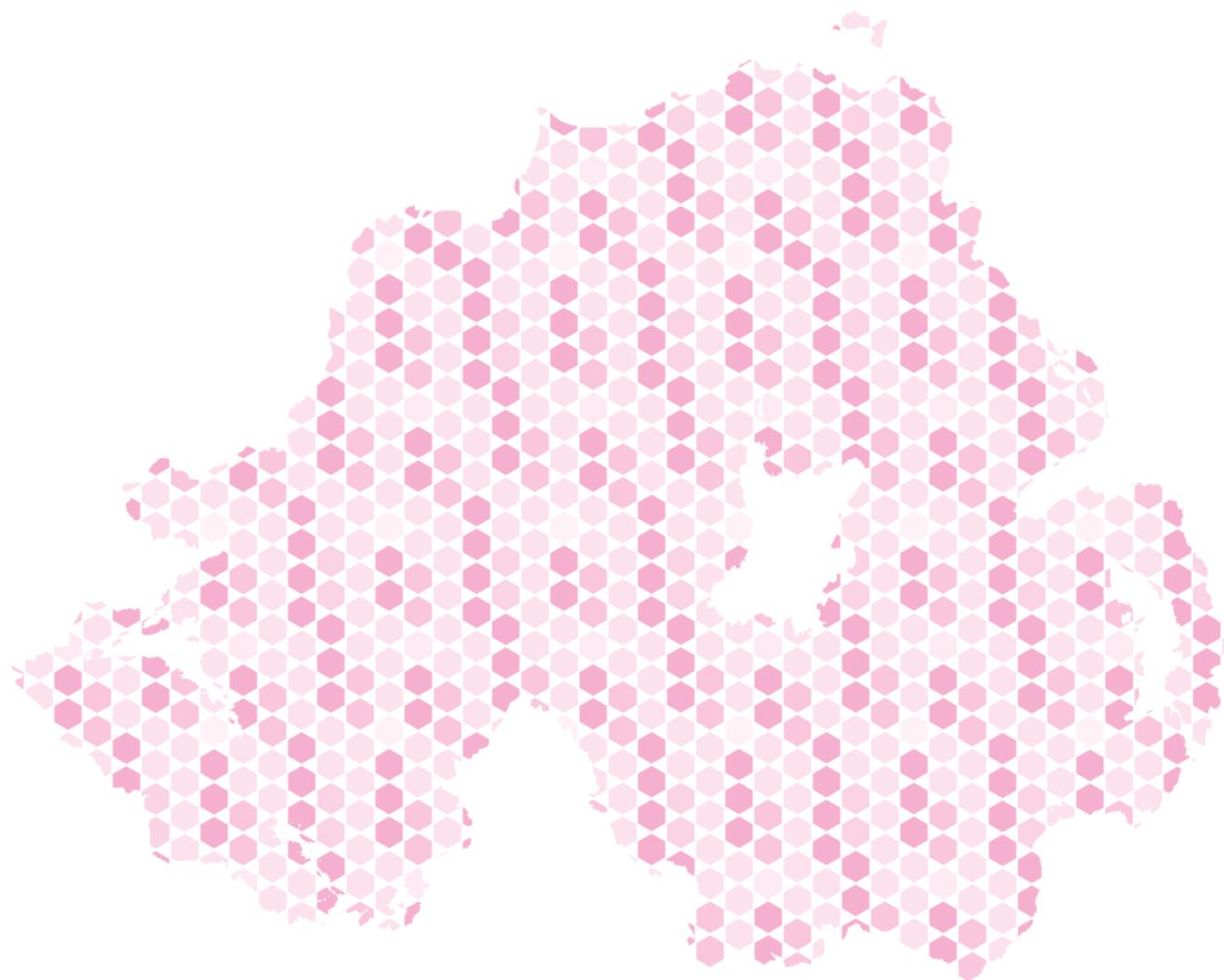


# Education and Training Inspectorate

## INDEPENDENT SCHOOL INSPECTION



Portadown Independent Christian (Co-educational) School, Portadown,  
County Armagh

DE Ref No (IS49)

Report of an Inspection in May 2019

# Contents

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Context	1
2. Focus of the inspection	1
3. Outcomes for learners	1
4. Quality of provision	2
5. Leadership and management	3
6. Safeguarding	3
7. Conclusion	3

## **Appendices**

- A. Inspection guidance
- B. Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

## 1. Context

Portadown Independent Christian School was established in September 1988 and is in its thirty-first year. It is a fee-paying nursery, primary and secondary school administered by Bethany Free Presbyterian Church, Portadown under the authority of the Presbytery Education Board of the Free Presbyterian Church. The school operates in a purpose-built building, within the grounds of the Bethany Free Presbyterian Church on a site close to the town. The accommodation meets health and safety standards. The school aims to create a caring and purposeful environment which enables all pupils to obtain the maximum benefit from their time at school, thus preparing them for “a life of fellowship with God and service to others”. All of the learners come from Portadown and the surrounding rural areas; the enrolment has increased significantly over the past four years. The learners are taught in four composite classes generally by key stage. They are grouped into: years one to three, four to seven, eight to ten and eleven to twelve.

Focus School	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Enrolment	14	19	26	31
% Attendance – primary age pupils	98	98	97	98
% Attendance – post- primary age pupils	98	98	97	98
Number of children on SEN register	*	*	*	5
No. of children with statements of educational needs	0	0	0	*
No. of newcomers	0	0	0	0

**Source:** data as held by the school.

\* = fewer than 5

## 2. 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 care and welfare; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

## 3. Outcomes for learners

- The learners are happy, welcoming and attentive; they are respectful of their peers, motivated, responsive and engage well in learning. They take pride in their achievements and present their work to a good standard. Their behaviour both in and out of class is exemplary and they engage easily with visitors to the school.
- As they progress through the school, the learners gain a clear understanding of key mathematical concepts. The learners’ books indicate that they make steady progress in numeracy. They engage actively and purposefully with their peers, particularly when doing practical tasks. The learners would benefit from more opportunities to participate in discussions to explore strategies and explain their thinking to deepen their understanding and progress in mathematics.

- From the early years to the examination class, the learners make very good progress in their language development. They are able to read stories for meaning, read aloud, tackle unknown words and spellings and write with growing confidence. When given the opportunity, they use language well to share and organise their thinking, solve problems and make decisions in a variety of contexts. While able to talk confidently with each other, the teacher and visitors, they would benefit from more engagement in class discussion to develop and extend their oral responses.
- In Key Stage 3 and 4, the standard of the learners' written work shows their grasp of a growing range of genres and purposes, including creative writing, and their ability to read, comprehend and respond to literature texts.
- Over the past six years, of the very small number of pupils entered for public examinations, most attained five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C. Although for the purpose of comparison the numbers are small, the proportion is in line with the NI average for all types of schools. The majority of the pupils attained five or more GCSEs, including GCSEs in English and mathematics, at grades A\* to C which is well above the corresponding average for non-selective schools.
- The learners progress to other schools or to the local regional college for post-16 study; and then to higher education or employment.
- The learners enter a number of external competitions and have been successful in local festivals in various categories including for example, craft, handwriting, photography and the best small schools award in art.

#### **4. Quality of provision**

- Almost all of the lessons observed were effective in progressing the learning with over half being highly effective. In these lessons, the learning activities were differentiated appropriately to meet the needs, interests and experiences of the learners within the composite classes. The school accommodation is attractive and well-resourced, including with information and communication technology; the instances of the effective use of ICT which were observed should be more widespread.
- The inspection findings confirm the appropriateness of the priorities identified in the current annual school development plan to develop further the planning for teaching and learning and to promote more consistently the use of assessment for learning and active learning strategies.
- The broad and balanced school curriculum is based on the teaching of the Bible and the framework of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Despite the small number of staff, the offer of up to 15 subject choices at GCSE level enables the learners to progress to the next stage of their education.
- The learners who require support with particular aspects of their learning are supported well in the school and benefit from intervention programmes through in-class and withdrawal support. The individual educational plans have appropriate targets which are reviewed regularly to inform the teaching strategies used to support the learners.

- The arrangements for the care and welfare of learners are effective. There is a caring, family atmosphere in the school, a secure learning environment and an appropriate focus on rewarding positive behaviour.

## **5. Leadership and management**

- The teaching principal, who has served the school well since its establishment, provides exemplary leadership and is committed to its continuing development and improvement work.
- All of the staff work very effectively as a team and are highly committed to meeting the spiritual, academic and pastoral needs of the learners. Nearly all of the staff have third level qualifications, most have teacher education qualifications and all engage in relevant staff development opportunities.
- There is a very good, positive working relationship between the principal and the school administrator. The principal updates the local management board regularly, which, as a result, is well informed about, and supportive of, the life and work of the school; including the standards and achievements of the learners.
- The one year school development plan, drawn up by the principal through appropriate consultation comprises a balanced appraisal of challenges and opportunities and identifies an appropriate range of school improvement actions. A good range of policies, reviewed on a regular basis, guides well the work of the school.
- The school is outward-looking and has developed very good links with the community through for example: monthly prayer meetings, the Harvest Thanksgiving Service and carol singing at a local nursing home. A number of local businesses support the school through sponsorship of a range of school events and fundraising activities. The school supports a number of charities both at home and abroad.

## **6. Safeguarding**

- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding the learners reflect the guidance from the Presbytery Committee for the Protection of Children and from the Department of Education.

## **7. Conclusion**

Portadown Independent Christian School provides efficient and suitable instruction for the learners<sup>1</sup>. The school should continue to be registered to provide education.

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<sup>1</sup> Education and Libraries Order (NI) 1986 Part IV 39 (1) c

## Inspection guidance

The guide to the inspection of independent schools is available at:

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

**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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