

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL INSPECTION

The Buddy Bear Trust Conductive Education School

DE Ref No (IS59)

Report of an inspection in December 2020



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Context

The Buddy Bear Trust Conductive Education School (Buddy Bear) is an independent special school situated in the centre of Dungannon. It is registered with the Department of Education (DE) and is also a registered charity, under the management of the Buddy Bear Trust, a charitable company established to promote conductive education. One pupil of post-primary age attends the school full-time. Two of the primary age children attend full-time, and six benefit from part-time placements in Buddy Bear and in their local mainstream primary school. At present the school provides part-time education of a daily two-hour, one-to-one session for all pupils as a result of Covid-19 arrangements. There is an additional private pre-school provision for three children who attend part-time for up to three hours per week. Eight children who are under the age of three attend the school on a part-time basis. An additional four pupils attend the school for sessions on request.

All of the pupils have significant difficulties associated with cerebral palsy, and almost all have severe learning difficulties and additional complex medical conditions. The pupils come from a wide catchment area, extending across Northern Ireland. Parents or family members provide transport to the school and wait in the school until the end of their child's session, most remain and observe in the classroom so that they are able to replicate the exercises for their child at home. One post-primary pupil has an Education Authority-funded place at the school which includes transport and music therapy. The school has two classroom assistants and a total of four Conductors/teachers, one of whom is the school principal. Three additional Conductors/teachers have been employed in the school since the time of the previous inspection, all the Conductor/teachers have trained with the Peto Institute¹ and are also registered with the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland. The accommodation complies with Health and Safety standards.

Buddy Bear Trust Conductive Education School				
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Enrolment	21	24	20	26
% Attendance	84%	67%	44%	N/A

Source: data as held by the school.

N/A Not available

¹ **Peto Institute.** The **Peto Institute**, Budapest, Hungary was established by Dr Andras **Peto** in 1945. It trains Conductors/teachers of children who have cerebral palsy and motor disorders to lead more independent lives by means of conductive education.

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 pupils are all at early stages of development. Progress in their individualised targets is monitored and documented regularly by their Conductors/teachers, and shared and celebrated with parents and family members.
- The pupils are very well settled and enjoy their routines and activities in school and interact well with staff and visitors. They engaged extremely well in the learning activities observed by the inspectors.
- The pupils all have complex physical difficulties arising from their medical conditions, despite these, they make steady progress in their physical, educational, communication, and play skills targets. They have succeeded variously in, for example, rolling, sitting, standing and walking with support, demonstrating secure progress towards independent movement. The pupils communicate well through various means including gesture, sound and speech. They demonstrate good social skills and respond willingly to requests.
- A small number of parents and family members shared with the inspectors their highly positive experiences of the school. They reported that their children are safe and very happy, and appreciate the ongoing support they receive from staff to increase their skills in helping their children through the use of the school routines and exercises.

Quality of provision

- The learning environment is highly inclusive and nurturing with child-centred, well-maintained, and very purposeful learning resources, including a well-equipped sensory room and outdoor play space. There is specialist equipment in each classroom, for example wall bars and ladder-back chairs, used by the staff to support the pupils towards independent movement and life skills.

- The pupils benefit from highly effective teaching and they enjoy individualised learning experiences which challenge and extend their skills. This excellent practice incorporates therapeutic exercises interwoven with educational activities to ensure that the pupils' physical needs are addressed throughout their teaching sessions. The classroom assistants contribute fully to delivering these programmes. During the sessions, the Conductors/teachers explain the exercises to the pupils who are encouraged to communicate their understanding back to the Conductor/teacher. Information and Communication Technology is used proficiently to enhance learning through, for example, the eye tracking devices for pupils with cortical visual impairment to enable communication and improve their skills and abilities.
- The Conductor/teachers' plan learning for each individual pupil. It is thorough, comprehensive and purposeful, and is monitored, reviewed and evaluated regularly through collaborative staff meetings. The resources used are well-planned, imaginative and linked closely to themes and to the pupil's individual interests. The insightful use of music, and singing in particular, embeds language concepts naturally.
- The support provided by the staff team for each pupil is extremely skilful, holistic, and transdisciplinary with members of staff consistently modelling appropriate responses and behaviour, and supporting the pupils to achieve their targets. Parents are coached to use the same strategies to support their child at home.
- The school is inclusive and has a highly positive ethos, addressing the educational, physical and health and well-being needs of the pupils throughout their time in school.

Leadership and management

- The teaching principal leads by example, with consistently high standards of provision appropriate for the complex and wide range of learning and physical needs of the pupils. She is strategic and methodical in planning for each cohort of pupils, engaging readily with mainstream schools and special schools. She leads skilfully the day-to-day management of the school, ensuring a safe and secure environment for the pupils and their parents.
- The staff teams are highly skilled. They self-evaluate continually their practice and the progress being made by the pupils. They monitor the effectiveness of the school provision to effect and sustain improvement. There is regular and detailed communication with the pupils' parents and family members.
- The board of trustees are highly committed to and support all aspects of the school. They meet regularly and are very well informed about safeguarding and the overall life and work of the school.

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

The Buddy Bear Trust Conductive Independent School provides efficient and suitable instruction for the learners².

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

² 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: [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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