

Report of a Pilot Inspection
Naíscoil an Chéide

February 2024



Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION | 1 |
| B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF | 1 |
| C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION..... | 1 |
| 2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS | 2 |
| 3. MAIN REPORT | 2 |
| A. SETTING THE VISION | 2 |
| B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION | 3 |
| C. BUILDING EQUITY | 4 |
| D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS | 4 |
| E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING..... | 4 |
| F. CHILD PROTECTION | 5 |
| 4. GOING FORWARD | 5 |

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Naíscoil an Chéide is an Irish-medium voluntary pre-school located within the building of St Francis of Assisi Primary School in Keady, County Armagh. There are currently 24 children attending the part-time session, a small number of whom have special educational needs (SEN). The children come from the Keady and Derrynoose Parish and from the surrounding rural area. Most of the children transfer to St Francis of Assisi Primary School for their primary education, where they can choose an Irish or English-medium route.

There is a well-established staff team in the naíscoil, which consists of a leader, deputy leader, nursery assistant and SEN assistant, all of whom have appropriate childcare qualifications and additional SEN accreditations. The members of the longstanding and proactive management committee have a broad range of relevant expertise and experience which they bring to their respective committee roles. An early years specialist (EYS) from Altram has been working in partnership with the setting for several years. The naíscoil is well connected to its local community.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF

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

Two-thirds of the parents (14) responded to the questionnaire; all of their responses were wholly positive. The small number of parents who included written comments expressed their satisfaction with the naíscoil and praised the staff who ‘go above and beyond for the children’.

A small number of parents met with the inspectors and spoke warmly about how much their children enjoy the naíscoil. They were appreciative of the kind and supportive staff and the regular and clear communication they received about their children’s progress.

All of the staff responded to the questionnaire and their responses were positive.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside the naíscoil to consider how well the naíscoil:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The vision ‘to provide high quality Irish-medium pre-school education in a safe, happy and inclusive environment in which the welfare, wellbeing and holistic development of each child is the primary focus’ is shared by all and drives every aspect of the life and work of the naíscoil.
- A well-established, collegial and effective process of self-evaluation is in place which is supported by appropriate action plans focused on continuous improvement.
- The cycle of planning, observation and assessment is child-centred and collaborative and guides the staff very effectively in meeting the needs of each child.
- The children are making very good progress in their learning and skills development across all areas of the pre-school curriculum, including their understanding of Irish.
- The children with SEN are supported very well in their learning and development. The strategies within the individual education plans (IEPs) are well thought out and guide the staff effectively in supporting the children. The targets within the IEPs and the associated success criteria are not always specific enough.
- The staff have created an inclusive immersion learning environment and promote, in conjunction with the pro-active management committee, the extension of the children’s language experiences within the wider community.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the naíscoil demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Area for further consideration:

- Review the targets and associated success criteria within the IEPs, to ensure that they are specific about the desired outcome for the child.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The naíscoil’s vision is to provide high-quality Irish-medium pre-school education in a safe, happy and inclusive environment in which the welfare, wellbeing and holistic development of each child is the primary focus. This vision is owned and shared by staff and management and is informed by the interests and needs of each individual child and by the pre-school curricular guidance.

The shared commitment to achieve the vision drives every aspect of the life and work of the naíscóil. A well-established process of self-evaluation is in place which is supported by appropriate action plans focused on continuous improvement and is informed by regular consultation with all stakeholders and a dedicated staff team who engage in regular reflective practice. The staff are supported well in this process by their EYS who acknowledges their capabilities as a team and works collaboratively with them, adopting a coaching-style approach to support and challenge them.

The management committee is strategic and forward-thinking and benefits from a complement of longstanding members and wider representation, including parents of children currently attending the naíscóil.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The staff have created a calm, welcoming and attractive learning environment in which all children are enabled to develop their independence and encouraged to make their own decisions, take risks and problem-solve during play. The wide range of natural and stimulating resources, both indoors and outdoors, supports high-quality play through promoting the children's curiosity and creativity and sustaining their interest and attention for extended periods of time.

There are clear strengths in the provision across all areas of the pre-school curriculum. The cycle of planning, observation and assessment is child-centred and comprehensive. The intended learning outcomes across each area of the curriculum are clear within the short-term planning and guide the staff very effectively in meeting the needs of each child. The well-embedded, reflective practice of all staff, their observations of individual children, their collegial daily evaluations of learning and the importance placed on responding to the opinions of the children are all used meaningfully to inform the planning, and impact positively the day-to-day provision. Feedback from parents and children is also sought during meetings which informs strategic planning priorities.

The staff have created a high-quality immersion environment in the naíscóil which supports the children very well in their acquisition of the Irish language. Planning for specific terminology is included in the short-term planners and effective language prompts are placed around the room as additional support to the staff. All staff are effective linguistic role models and continue to attend Irish language classes in order to maintain and develop further their own competence and confidence in the language.

There is a caring and inclusive ethos in the naíscóil and relationships at all levels are respectful and supportive. The children's health and wellbeing is prioritised through for example: the staff's skilful and pastoral interactions with the children at all times; the daily outdoor play session; the attention given to physical movement and energetic play; the provision of a healthy break; and the priority placed on developing the children's capacity to understand and talk about their emotions.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

The comprehensive, responsive planning and high-quality, inclusive and well-resourced learning environment support well the holistic development of all of the children.

The children with SEN are supported very well in their learning and development. Early identification of the children's individual needs is prioritised and effective; the information from this process informs to good effect the programme for staff professional learning. The staff support and reassure parents when they first express an interest in enrolling their child in the naíscoil and signpost them, at this early stage, to relevant support services if required.

Collaborative partnerships at all levels are valued in order to best meet the needs of the children, including those with parents and with a wide range of agencies and health and educational professionals. There are IEPs in place for those children with SEN and regular reviews of progress are undertaken, in partnership with parents and other stakeholders as appropriate. Although there are clear strategies laid out in the IEPs to guide the provision, the targets within the IEPs and associated success criteria are not always specific enough about the desired outcome for the individual child.

D. EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children are making very good progress in their learning and development across all areas of the pre-school curriculum, as evidenced from the baseline information and observations, ongoing observations and assessments, and the regular progress reports to parents.

The children follow the well-embedded routines of the day and are developing their confidence and independence as they: initiate and extend creatively their own play; and talk confidently and articulately about their play with each other and with the adults. The children's language is developing well. They have a very good understanding of the Irish spoken to them and are using single words and short phrases in Irish naturally in their own speech. They show a keen interest in stories, songs and rhymes and mark make for a range of purposes around the playroom. The children's investigative skills and their curiosity are enabled through the stimulating and authentic resources in both the indoor and outdoor environments.

The children's work is valued and celebrated. The children can choose which pieces of their work they wish to display in the playroom and the staff also collate the children's work in learning journey booklets and art folders. Weekly awards are presented to the children for their efforts and achievements and social media is used to celebrate the children's participation in various activities and special events.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The staff and management are very proactive in promoting the growth and development of a community of learning by prioritising a programme of staff professional learning which is inclusive, flexible and responsive to the needs of the children.

In addition to the naíscoil’s vision, the management committee articulates its wider vision of a vibrant Irish language community locally, including Irish-medium education as a viable option for all children and young people in the Keady and surrounding area. The management committee is proactive in sourcing funding for Irish language events and classes for the children’s families and the wider community in order to provide opportunities for the children of the naíscoil and their families to benefit from extended experiences through Irish.

The naíscoil provides the children with meaningful opportunities to learn with and from others, including with children in the primary school’s Irish-medium provision and through their links with local businesses, services and places of interest.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the naíscoil demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

4. GOING FORWARD

Naíscoil an Chéide provides high-quality Irish-medium pre-school education in a safe, happy and inclusive environment in which the welfare, wellbeing and holistic development of each child is the primary focus. The highly skilled and dedicated staff identify and support the needs of all the children and listen and respond to the children’s views and interests to inform the day-to-day planning.

ETI will continue to work with Naíscoil an Chéide, including to share examples of highly effective practice from which others may learn. An aspect of practice which should be shared more widely is:

- the skilful use staff make of their observations and the voice of the child to inform the daily planning.

Naíscoil an Chéide is well placed to take forward the area for further consideration detailed in this report.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2024

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the [ETI website](#)

Follow us on  [@ETI_news](#)  [@ETInews](#)  InsPIRE