

# EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

Bangor Independent Christian School,  
Bangor, County Down

DE Ref No IS36

Report of a Re-registration Inspection Visit in  
February 2024



Providing Inspection services for:  
Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
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## Context

Bangor Independent Christian School is situated on the Clandeboye Road in Bangor, adjacent to Bangor Free Presbyterian Church. The school has pre-school provision which is known as Sunbeams Pre-School. The school is administered by Bangor Free Presbyterian Church under the auspices of the Presbytery Education Board. The school's vision is rooted in Christian education and this is central to what is taught and how lessons are taught in the school. School funding is provided by fees paid by parents, covenant support, gifts and fund-raising events.

Most of the learners attending the school come from North Down. The learners are aged between four and sixteen years of age and the learners of primary school age are grouped together in one composite class. While there are separate classes for learners in key stage (KS) 3 and KS 4, they also form a composite class across a small number of subjects.

The children attending Sunbeams Pre-school are aged between 2 years and 10 months and four years. There are 17 children enrolled in the provision who come from Bangor and Newtownards.

<b>Bangor Independent Christian School</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
School Enrolment	10	13	10	10
Pre-school Enrolment	18	16	15	17
No. of pupils of primary school age	6	9	6	*
No. of pupils of post-primary school age	*	*	*	6
% Attendance for pupils of primary school age	96	95	98	97
% Attendance for pupils of post-primary school age	94	97	95	97
FSME Percentage	*	*	*	*
No. of pupils on the register of special educational needs	*	*	*	*
No. of pupils with a statement of educational need	*	*	*	*

Source: data as held by the school.

\* fewer than 5

N/A not applicable

## Focus of the Re-registration Inspection Visit

During the re-registration inspection visit, the inspectors focused on the extent to which the:

- school provides efficient and suitable instruction (referred to in this report as 'provision') that is matched to the age, gender and ability of the pupils;

- arrangements for child protection and safeguarding (including the vetting arrangements for staff) are appropriate, are in place and are being implemented;
- accommodation is suitable for a school and is appropriate for the age, gender and numbers of pupils attending the school;
- equipment and resources are sufficient, safe and appropriate, including those related to fire safety; and
- pupils get access to education on a full-time basis, with reference to pupil attendance.

It should be noted that independent schools are not obliged to follow the Northern Ireland Curriculum and may employ teachers who do not hold teaching qualifications recognised by the Department of Education (DE). Further details of the nature of the curriculum offered and the teaching qualifications held by the staff are included in this report. Inspectors observed teaching and learning, scrutinised documentation and the pupils' written work and held discussions with the teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

## Outcomes for learners

The learners are welcoming, polite and have good relationships with one another. They show interest in their work, apply themselves well to their learning and engage purposefully in class activities. They make steady progress and their academic outcomes are good.

The children in the pre-school class are very happy and enjoy their learning. They respond readily to well-established learning routines, transition easily to new activities and engage well with one other. The children are developing well their independence.

The school embeds success well. All of the learners are working towards the achievement of *personalised* targets related to knowledge and skill development. The work in the learners' books is well presented, marked regularly and supplemented, in the better examples, with effective teacher guidance on how to improve the quality of the work. The learners are provided with the opportunity to enter art and creative writing competitions. Last year they participated in the United Christian School Choir which provided them with the opportunity to socialise with their peers from five other Independent Christian schools.

In line with the school's vision that values highly reading, writing and mathematics, teachers promote well the importance of accuracy in spelling, punctuation, grammar and in being able to read fluently. The range of the learners' writing experiences is limited and they would grow as more mature writers by being given more opportunities to compose in a wider range of genres from an earlier age.

The work in the pupils' numeracy books is generally accurate and well presented, focussing mainly on number work. The learners' mathematical skills could be enhanced further by access to a wider range of mathematical experiences, including problem solving, aspects of financial capability and the wider application of mathematical thinking.

The learners attain well in examinations at the end of KS 4. Over the last five years, almost all have attained at least seven GCSE grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics. In particular, the learners achieve very well in the GCSE qualification of business and communication systems (BACS).

The learners progress appropriately to level 3 courses in local colleges of Further Education, apprenticeships or employment.

## Provision for learning

The school provides efficient and suitable instruction, which meets the needs of all of the learners. The children of pre-school age attend the pre-school from 9.30 am to 11.30 am. All the learners in the school have access to full-time education, beginning at 9.00 am and ending at 3.00 pm. For almost all, attendance is very good.

The school has a complement of five staff and most are employed part-time. Almost all hold third-level qualifications, with one member of staff having a Master's degree in Education post-graduate qualification. The pre-school teacher has a third level qualification in Early Childhood Studies. All of the teachers have achieved accreditation in the part-time Diploma in Christian Education awarded by the Presbytery Education Board.

The pre-school is resourced appropriately for sensory, creative and imaginative play. The staff know the children very well and work together effectively to provide engaging learning experiences through play for all the children. They support the children individually and use appropriate strategies to develop communication skills when required, such as the use of visual prompts.

The children benefit from a primary curriculum that includes an appropriate balance of art, geography, information and communication technology (ICT), physical education (PE), swimming, craft, church studies, church history, science, mathematics, French and English.

The curriculum at KS 3 includes history, geography, home economics, scripture, church history, ICT, PE, art, learning for life and work (LLW), technology and design, mathematics, science, English and English literature. At KS 4, the curriculum also includes the study of GCSE qualifications in BACS, health and social care studies, chemistry, physics and biology. GCSE chemistry is delivered online by Newtownabbey Independent Christian school, with occasional opportunities for pupils to attend this associated school and participate in practical learning with their peers through this wider community of learning.

There are good learning experiences outside the curriculum which include carol singing in the local nursing care home, swimming at the local leisure centre, visits to nearby historical sites such as the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and Carrickfergus Castle, and visits to other attractions such as Streamvale Open Farm and Windsor Park National Stadium. These wider experiences embed success further and allow the children to develop and apply their wider social skills in a range of stimulating contexts.

A small number of learners require additional help with aspects of their learning, particularly with literacy. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) completes assessments in phonological awareness, spelling and reading comprehension and supports one-to-one withdrawal interventions led by a classroom assistant. There is effective monitoring of learner progress which informs appropriately the tailored support and the completion of annual reviews.

Most of the lessons were effective and characterised by a positive, supportive ethos and very good working relationships. The lessons were well-structured with the teachers facilitating the learners' independence. They began with clear exposition and built appropriately on prior learning. When there was over-direction by the teacher or a lack of variety of learning experiences, the lessons did not engage the learners fully or permit them sufficient time to collaborate with their peers.

Appropriate emphasis is placed on developing the pupils' ICT skills with a discrete weekly class at each key stage. At KS 3, the pupils are provided with the opportunity to conduct informed internet research, select relevant material and create engaging presentations. The staff participate in appropriate staff professional learning opportunities to guide the successful development of the pupils' ICT skills.

## **Child Protection and Safeguarding**

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection visit, there are appropriate arrangements for child protection and safeguarding of pupils in place. The school has identified that there is a need to review and update sections of the safeguarding policy more regularly in order to respond more promptly to the external threats to safety and wellbeing faced by children and young people today: for example, guidance for learners and staff on the safe use of social media. The staff in the pre-school have also identified the need for an intimate care policy. It is timely that the Presbytery Education Board is currently updating the church's child protection policy and guidelines. In the interim period, the school is amending its own policy to ensure that it reflects current practice.

## **Accommodation, equipment and resources, including health and safety**

The accommodation is suitable for a school and is appropriate for the age, gender and numbers of pupils attending the school.

At the time of the inspection, the equipment and resources are sufficient, safe and appropriate. In addition to the annual servicing of fire extinguishers and the fire alarm system, the school completes and documents the outcomes of weekly checks of the fire alarm system and monthly checks of fire extinguishers, emergency lighting and emergency door release.

## Summary of Key Findings

- Bangor Independent Christian School provides efficient and suitable instruction that is matched to the age, gender and ability of the pupils (Education and Libraries Order (NI) 1986 Part IV 39 (1) c).
- Based on the evidence available at the time of the re-registration visit, there are appropriate arrangements for child protection and safeguarding of pupils in place.
- The accommodation is suitable for a school and is appropriate for the age, gender and numbers of pupils attending the school.
- The equipment and resources are sufficient, safe and appropriate, including those related to fire safety.


## Conclusion

On receipt of this report, and considering all other evidence available, the Department of Education has concluded that the school will continue to be registered to provide education.

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