

Mourne Independent Christian School,
Kilkeel, County Down

DE Ref No IS48

Report of a Re-registration Inspection Visit in June 2023



Providing Inspection services for:
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Context

Mourne Independent Christian School is situated in the town of Kilkeel and has been providing education in the area for 35 years. The school is administered by the Mourne School Board under the auspices of the Presbytery Education Board of the Free Presbyterian Church. Most of the pupils come from the town of Kilkeel and the surrounding area and the school provides education for pupils aged four to 16 years.

The school aims to support pupils to recognise and develop their unique gifts and talents, encourages them to respect one another and provides a learning environment underpinned by Christian values. The school has charitable status and is funded by donations.

Over the last four years, the number of post-primary pupils has increased annually, and the overall enrolment has increased by over one-third in the past year. The pupils are grouped generally into four composite classes: year one to year four; year five to year seven; year eight to year ten; and year 11 and year 12. At the time of the inspection, the pupils in year 11 and year 12 were sitting public examinations and were absent from school on study leave.

Mourne Independent School	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Enrolment	20	18	19	26
No. of pupils of primary school age	12	8	7	11
No. of pupils of post-primary school age	8	10	12	15
% Attendance for pupils of primary school age	98	99	95	95
% Attendance for pupils of post-primary school age	97	99	97	95
No. of pupils on the register of special educational needs	*	*	*	7

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

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 General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland or the Department of Education. 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 staff with specific responsibilities.

Outcomes for learners

The primary-aged pupils engage readily in their learning with good levels of sustained concentration; they are enthusiastic in practical and active tasks. They interact respectfully with, and are supportive of, their peers in the composite classes. They are growing in confidence and enjoyed talking about their work with the inspectors.

The post-primary pupils work well both independently and collaboratively with their peers, taking on roles and responsibilities in group work with confidence. When encountering new concepts, they are able to make relevant connections to their prior learning which enables them to engage fully in their lessons, gain new knowledge and a deeper understanding of their topics studied.

Over the course of the school year and across the year groups, there is clear progression in the standard of work and the level of accuracy in the pupils' books. However, there is variation in the quality of the presentation and handwriting at primary level.

The pupils have participated in a number of projects to raise money for the school, such as through, for example, an initiative involving the recycling of textiles which also raised their awareness of environmental issues. They are developing a growing awareness of social responsibility by raising money for others through, for example, the Christmas Hamper Appeal and to help fund missionary work in Spain.

At the end of key stage (KS) 4, most of the pupils progress to a local school for post-16 study and a small number of pupils access courses at a local further education college. The pupils attain very well in public examinations. Over the last three years, almost all attained seven or more GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics.

Provision for learning

The school provides efficient and suitable instruction which meets the needs of all of the pupils.

The school has a complement of ten teachers and almost all are employed part-time. One-half of the staff have a teaching qualification and a small number have obtained additional post-graduate qualifications which support the provision for special educational needs.

All of the lessons observed were effective. The lessons were structured purposefully so that pupils were motivated and engaged in their learning. The more effective lessons were well paced and there was an appropriate balance of teacher exposition, individual work and group activity. In a small number of lessons observed, the levels of support and challenge within the composite classes were not tailored sufficiently to meet the individual needs of a small number of pupils.

The primary curriculum includes an appropriate balance of English, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), the world around us (WAU), Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), the arts, scripture and physical education (PE). At KS 3 there are additional learning areas which include environment and society, science and technology, French, home economics, key board skills and learning for life and work (LLW). At KS 4, the pupils study a suitable range of subjects at GCSE level and, to help extend the curriculum, there is collaboration with another Independent Christian School in the Presbytery network which provides the online teaching of physics.

The pupils are provided with valuable learning opportunities, including Geography fieldwork trips, work experience placements and participation in a joint school choir. There are a number of external visitors to the school who support and enhance their learning, for example, in subjects such as history, home economics and careers.

Just over one-quarter of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs. The school provides group and individual interventions which are monitored carefully and assistive technologies, such as pen readers, are used well to support pupils in class. The individual education plans are detailed and provide evidence that all of the pupils are making progress with their learning.

Throughout the school, the learning environment is well structured and there are well-embedded routines. The teachers' marking, particularly in literacy, identifies well the pupils' strengths and provides clear guidance to the pupils on how to improve their work further. The teaching of numeracy is overly reliant on worksheets and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their problem-solving and investigative skills.

The pupils have access to full-time education, beginning at 9.00 am and ending at 3.15 pm each day. Pupil attendance is very good.

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. To improve the arrangements further, the school has identified the need to update the anti-bullying and risk management policies.

Evidence was provided by the school that Access NI vetting has been carried out for all members of staff.

Accommodation, equipment and resources, including health and safety

The accommodation is suitable for the provision of education and is appropriate for the age, gender and numbers of pupils attending. There are plans to develop and resource further the playground for pupils.

The equipment and resources are sufficient, safe and appropriate, including those related to fire safety. The school's health and safety policy sets out the arrangements for fire safety, emergency evacuations, building security and site management.

Summary of Key Findings

- Mournie 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 inspection 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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