

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

Newtownabbey Independent Christian
School, Glengormley, County Antrim

DE Ref No IS34

Report of a Re-registration Inspection Visit in
January 2024



Providing Inspection services for:
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Context

Newtownabbey Independent Christian School is situated on the Ballyclare Road on the outskirts of Glengormley. The school is administered by Newtownabbey Free Presbyterian Church under the auspices of the Presbytery Education Board of the Free Presbyterian Church. The school celebrated its 40th year anniversary in September 2023. The school's vision places Christian instruction at the centre of every aspect of its life and work.

The learners come from a wide catchment area which stretches as far as Larne, and Ballymena. Around one-half of the learners belong to local Free Presbyterian Churches and the others come from a range of backgrounds. Over the last four years, enrolment has remained steady. The learners are aged from three years to 18 years and are grouped in four composite classes by key stage (KS), with two additional learners in sixth form.

Newtownabbey Independent Christian School	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Enrolment	35	35	35	40
No. of pupils of primary school age	18	17	17	14
No. of pupils of post-primary school age	17	18	20	26
% Attendance for pupils of primary school age	93%	94%	93%	94%
% Attendance for pupils of post-primary school age	99%	98%	95.5%	97%
FSME Percentage	5.7%	5.7%	14.3%	7.5%
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

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, considered a sample of the pupils' written work and held discussions with the teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

Outcomes for learners

The learners are happy, respectful to their peers and to adults, and engaged in their lessons. They listen attentively and work well independently. Their behaviour in and out of class is exemplary.

The school embeds success well. Around the school building, there are attractive displays of the learners' achievements, particularly in art. The work in the learners' books is well presented, with an emphasis on accurate working out in numeracy, and paragraphing, spelling, punctuation and grammar in literacy. There is evidence of progression in the learners' work across the year, particularly in number and comprehension. To extend the learners' flexibility in numeracy and communication skills in literacy, they will benefit from completing more regular real-life problem-solving tasks and experiencing a wider range of writing-related activities in different genres.

The learners in the KS 2 and KS 3 classes achieve well in the Online Language Assessment (OLA) in French: their success at these early stages builds the learners' confidence and promotes uptake of French at GCSE and A level.

The learners attain good outcomes in public examinations at the end of KS 4. Over the last four years, all have attained at least seven GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. They progress to post-16 study in the school, level 3 courses in a range of disciplines in local colleges, apprenticeships or employment. After A level, learners have accessed courses at local universities in, for example, animation and broadcast production.

Provision for learning

The school provides efficient and suitable instruction, which meets the needs of all of the pupils. The learners have access to full-time education, beginning at 8.50am and ending at: 2.20pm for lower primary; 2.50pm for upper primary; and 3.20pm for post-primary learners. Pupil attendance is very good.

The school has a complement of seven staff and most are employed part-time. Most hold third-level qualifications and one has a teaching qualification recognised by DE. Almost all of the teachers have diplomas in Christian Education awarded by the Presbytery Education Board.

The primary curriculum includes an appropriate balance of English, mathematics, arts, science and physical education (PE) as well as creation studies, church history and Scripture, all of which reflect the school's vision and mission. In the KS 1 curriculum, the children would benefit from a greater emphasis in the curriculum on play-based learning to develop their oracy and wider inter-personal skills.

The curriculum at KS 3 and 4 is sufficiently broad, comprising 14 subjects, as well as Scripture. English literature, home economics, digital technology, design and technology and business communication systems are notable additions to the KS 4 curriculum. At post-16, five different subjects are taken by the small number of learners, namely: mathematics, French, health and social care, geography and art and design.

The learners benefit from a suitable range of extra-curricular opportunities, such as: swimming, field trips to historical sites, a politics trip to Westminster, events run by the Ulster-Scots Agency, inter-generational experiences with the residents of a local fold for older people and families, and active participation in the celebrations marking the school's 40th year since its opening. The senior pupils also have work experience opportunities.

A small number of learners require additional help with aspects of their learning: this is provided through individualised work in class and classroom assistant support. The staff know the learners well and the principal has availed of teacher professional learning in helping her to assess their needs appropriately. The learners will benefit further from the refinement of the individual education plans, which contain too many targets for the children. A smaller number of more sharply focused targets will help staff to monitor more effectively the progress made by the individual learners.

All of the lessons observed were effective and characterised by respectful relationships and disciplined classrooms. The teachers have a sound subject knowledge, structure lessons purposefully and efficiently, give clear instruction and use effective questioning to assess the learners' knowledge. The learners will benefit from experiencing a wider range of pedagogical approaches, including more paired or group discussion activities, and the use of a wider range of resources to support learning, including information and communication technology (ICT). The learners' books are marked regularly and the teachers' comments give clear guidance on how the work can be improved.

Child Protection and Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the re-registration visit, there are appropriate arrangements for child protection and the safeguarding of pupils in place. The school has identified that there is a need to review and update more regularly sections of the safeguarding policy to reflect more comprehensively the external threats that children and young people face today to their safety and wellbeing. It is timely that the Presbytery Education Board is currently updating the church's child protection policy and guidelines.

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.

The equipment and resources are sufficient and appropriate. The school's health and safety policy sets out the arrangements for emergency evacuations, the security of the site, including the playground, and the regular testing of equipment.

Summary of Key Findings

- Newtownabbey 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.


Appendix: Health and Safety

While all fire extinguishers had been checked recently, the school recognised the need to complete an up-to-date fire risk assessment. Following the inspection, the management board of the school had a full fire risk assessment carried out by an accredited external agency at the earliest opportunity. PAT testing of electrical equipment in the classrooms has also been identified as a priority: it is important to complete this work before the end of the school year.

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