

Report of a Pre-school Inspection
Naíscoil na Fuisseoige

January 2025



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Throughout the report the use of an asterisk * indicates that there is further information in Appendix 2.

1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Naíscoil na Fúiseoige is an Irish-medium voluntary pre-school situated in the Twinbrook area of Belfast for the past forty years. Since 2019, it has been accommodated within a purpose-built Irish language community and early years centre, Ionad na Fúiseoige, in Twinbrook. There are currently 34 children attending the two part-time sessions in the naíscoil, almost all of whom attended a session the previous year for children who are not yet at target pre-school age, and a significant minority of whom attended the Irish-medium daycare facility in Ionad na Fúiseoige from a very young age. Almost all of the children come from the Twinbrook and the wider Colin area, and a small number come from Belfast and Lisburn. A minority of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN). There are five members of staff, comprising a leader, a deputy leader and 3 nursery assistants, 2 of whom have been in post for less than 4 months. A well-established management committee, of which the onsite centre manager for Ionad na Fúiseoige is a member, oversee the work of the naíscoil.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to parents and staff in advance of the inspection. A minority of the parents (15%) responded to the questionnaire and, of those who responded, a majority (60%) provided written comments. Almost all of the responses were wholly positive and in particular, the parents praised the exceptional staff who are always welcoming and willing to listen. All of the staff responded to the questionnaire and all of 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

- Naíscoil na Fúiseoige's vision to 'create a nurturing and inclusive early years learning environment where children naturally acquire Irish language skills through full immersion in the Irish language' drives all aspects of the life and work of the naíscoil.

- Meaningful consultation with a range of stakeholders, including the management committee, Altram*, staff and parents has informed appropriate priorities for improvement in line with the vision. The priorities include a review of the approach to planning, learning and assessment to develop a shared understanding of the intended learning outcomes for the children.
- The staff are developing well a shared understanding of the recently reviewed cycle of planning, observations and assessment which now focuses more clearly on the intended learning across the pre-school curriculum. As a result, almost all of the children are very well settled and are making progress in their learning, from their individual starting points, across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.
- All of the staff received an Irish-medium education and speak Irish naturally, confidently and consistently in all of their interactions. As a result, they have created an effective and language-rich learning environment in which the children are acquiring a good understanding of Irish and are beginning to use Irish with each other and with the adults during play.
- Almost all of the children's early language skills are developing well as they experiment imaginatively with writing during purposeful play; share their thoughts, opinions and feelings confidently with each other and with the adults; listen with interest to and participate enthusiastically in the whole-group story; and access and enjoy books independently.
- Links with a local Irish-medium primary school and outside agencies, such as a Sure Start project and the Early Years Inclusion Services, provide support for parents and carers from an early stage, enable the early identification of special educational needs (SEN), and aid smooth transitions for the children as they progress to primary education.
- The wellbeing of the children is supported very effectively by the consistently warm and caring interactions of the staff and the opportunities provided for energetic physical play.
- An effective strategic approach to partnerships and collaboration is supporting very well the social, pastoral and educational needs of parents/carers and the wider local community, cultivating a love for Irish language, culture and heritage in line with the naíscoil's vision.
- 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 action:

- to provide a planned programme of professional learning for all staff to support them to develop further their confidence and competence in identifying and meeting children's individual special needs.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

Naíscoil na Fúiseoige’s vision to ‘create a nurturing and inclusive early years learning environment where children naturally acquire Irish language skills through full immersion in the Irish language’ is visible in all aspects of the daily life and work of the naíscoil. The staff and management committee of the naíscoil, and of the wider centre, Ionad na Fúiseoige, are committed to the holistic development of each child through fostering family and community involvement and cultivating a community-wide love for learning, culture and heritage.

Meaningful consultation with a range of stakeholders, including the well-established and skilled management committee, the early years specialist (EYS) from Altram, staff and parents informs appropriate priorities for development to support the staff to achieve fully their shared vision in the best interests of the children. As part of this process, the staff team, with the effective support of their EYS, identified the need to review their approach to planning, learning and assessment in order to develop further a shared understanding of the intended learning outcomes across the pre-school curriculum. An appropriate action plan is in place, with well-considered, manageable and child-focused targets and relevant supporting actions which is guiding the staff effectively in this important development work.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

The staff work well together and are developing a shared understanding of planning for learning. They record regular observations of the children’s progression in learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum, and, on most occasions, the information recorded is concise and relevant and informs future planning for individual children.

The staff, in both playrooms, have created welcoming, attractive and well-organised learning environments in which the children can access independently a wide range of stimulating and natural resources, which support very well the development of their creativity, imagination and independence. Routines and transitions are well embedded and encourage the children to develop a sense of responsibility and respect for themselves, for each other and for their resources and learning environment. For example, the children put on their aprons at messy play, invite their friends to join them when a space becomes available at an activity and they tidy up a play area when they have finished.

All of the staff received an Irish-medium education and speak Irish naturally, consistently and confidently in all of their interactions with the children. They use skilfully a range of effective language and communication strategies, such as repetition, role-modelling and the use of non-verbal cues, to support the children in their understanding and early acquisition of Irish naturally during play and transitions. Songs, rhymes, games and stories are used to good effect to further expose the children to Irish and to consolidate their vocabulary across the curriculum.

The wellbeing of all children is supported very effectively through: the caring and pastoral interactions of the staff; extended opportunities for the children to engage in physical development and energetic movement outdoors; the intentional, planned focus on emotions and feelings; the provision of a healthy snack; and the informal, sensitive and supportive communication with parents at drop-off and pick-up times.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

A wholly inclusive and nurturing ethos exists in Naíscóil na Fúiseoige in which the needs of each child are identified from an early stage, often while they are attending the daycare facility as babies or during their penultimate year in Ionad na Fúiseoige. Well-established and effective partnerships have been developed over the years with parents and carers, the community, relevant external organisations and other providers, such as the local Sure Start project and the Early Years Inclusion Services, which enable the early identification of SEN and ensure support and interventions are in place, often before the child starts their pre-school year in the naíscóil.

Individual educational plans (IEPs) are created which contain clear and specific targets and a range of appropriate strategies to support individual children. The IEPs are shared with the staff and guide them effectively in meeting the needs of the children who have been identified as having SEN, ensuring consistency in the approaches and strategies used. As a result, the individual needs of the children are being met effectively and they are making progress in their learning from their individual starting points. Going forward, a planned programme of professional learning is required to support all of the staff in developing further their confidence and competence to identify and plan for the children's individual needs.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

Almost all of the children are very well settled and are making progress in their learning across all areas of the pre-school curriculum.

They arrive to the naíscóil happy and excited to go straight to free play at an activity of their choice. They are developing well their social skills, independence and ability to self-manage as they follow the well-established routines, such as self-registering, putting their jumper in their own drawer, putting on an apron for messy play at the sand, water or creative area and tidying up after themselves.

Almost all of the children engage in collaborative, creative and purposeful play for extended periods of time across the playrooms and are building friendships with each other. Their early language skills are developing well as they experiment imaginatively with writing during purposeful role play. They also use clip boards to plan at the construction area; share their thoughts, opinions and feelings confidently with each other and with the adults; listen with interest to and participate enthusiastically in the whole-group story; and access and enjoy books independently.

The children have a good understanding of the Irish spoken to them by the staff and are using single words and short phrases in Irish naturally and independently with the adults and during play with each other.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

The leader and management committee of the naíscoil are proactive in seeking out and delivering opportunities for parents and the wider community to develop social and support networks and enjoy a variety of classes and events linked to the arts, drama and music, all through the medium of Irish. The children in the naíscoil enjoy a language rich learning environment in each of the playrooms and also benefit from being part of this growing Irish-language community in Ionad na Fuisseoige.

The staff team work very well together. They reflect on their key strengths and recognise the benefits of collaboration for the children and for themselves and are keen to embrace professional learning opportunities. The naíscoil has developed effective partnerships with and makes use of a variety of support networks, such as the expertise of local primary school staff, the local Sure Start provider, health visitors, educational psychologists and their EYS from Altram, to continually build the capacity and confidence of the staff and develop all aspects of the provision in the best interests of each child.

Partnerships with parents and families are valued and nurtured. The centre manager and staff communicate effectively with parents from the initial open days in June and throughout the naíscoil year. Induction is well planned and information given to parents is supportive and accessible and clearly lays out what to expect in the pre-school year and how they will be kept informed of their child's progress. The staff hold three formal face-to-face meetings with parents throughout the year to update them on their child's progress and to listen to and support the parents with any concerns they may have. The drop-off and pick-up routines each day also provide informal relaxed opportunities for parents to talk with the staff should they wish. The online digital application is used effectively to share photographs of the children playing, keep parents up-to-date of any events taking place and support them with the Irish language by providing key vocabulary and support with pronunciation.

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

There is a shared commitment between all of the staff and the management committee in Naíscoil na Fuisseoige to meeting the needs of each child in a caring, inclusive and language rich environment, within a wider community of learning where a love for the Irish language, culture and heritage is cultivated for all.

The inspection has highlighted an area for action to enable Naíscoil na Fúiseoige to achieve its vision more fully. ETI will monitor the progress of the naíscoil in addressing the area for action.

5. APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

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%

APPENDIX 2: NOTES

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Altram

[Altram](#) is the regional support group for Irish-medium early years' projects.

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