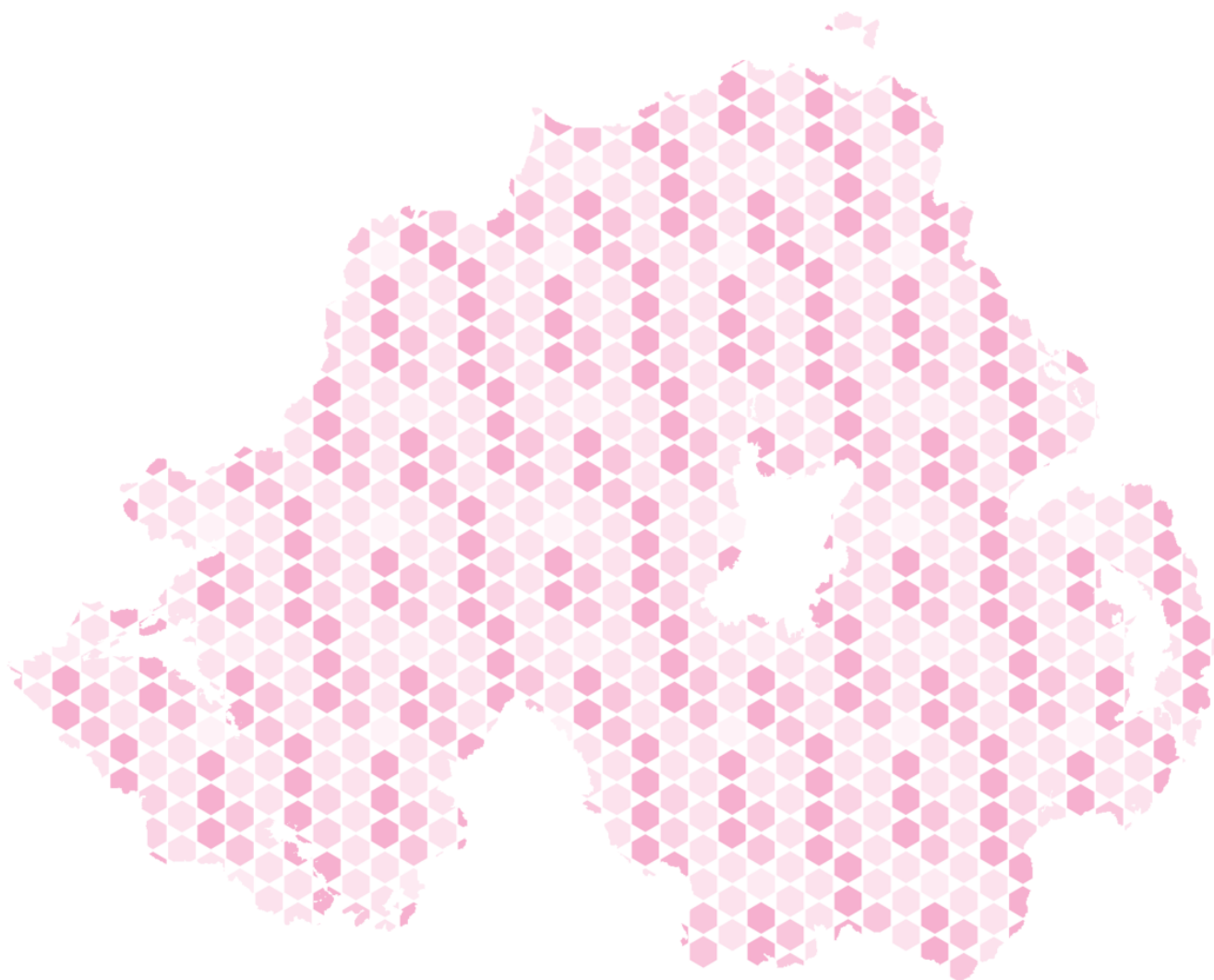


Education and Training Inspectorate INDEPENDENT SCHOOL INSPECTION



Harmony Christian (Co-educational) School, Ballynahinch, County Down

DE Ref No (IS103)

Report of an Inspection in September 2019



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
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1. Context

Harmony Christian School was opened in April 2019 evolving from a co-operative arrangement since 2016 whereby children and young people who were being home educated came together for three days a week as a group. The school is housed in the premises of the New Testament Pentecostal Church on Main Street, Ballynahinch and caters for learners aged from 4 to 18 years; the accommodation complies with Health and Safety standards. The school is managed under the auspices of the trustees of the New Testament Pentecostal Church and the operational management is overseen by the board of governors, chaired by the Pastor.

The learners come mainly from Ballynahinch and the surrounding area; at the time of initial registration the enrolment stands at fifteen (including one pre-school age child). The pupil/teacher ratio is low and there are three teaching groups: the Reception class; the ABC class; and, the Learning Centre. While the accommodation is well maintained and appointed and is just adequate for the current enrolment, the Church has embarked on a development project to renovate an adjacent building to accommodate an increase in numbers.

2. Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the learners' achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy, in particular, how the school is addressing low attainment and under-achievement where applicable;
- whether the accommodation is suitable and meets health and safety standards;
- the quality of provision in the school, with a particular focus on the implementation of the procedures for safeguarding and pastoral care; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

3. Outcomes for learners

- The learners are very well settled, show good listening and self-management skills and are happy in class. They persevere with tasks and, as they progress through the school, take responsibility for their own learning. All of the learners engage readily and confidently with the adults in the school, and with visitors, and express their views clearly. They develop further their oral skills through, for example, presentations of their research work to their peers in assembly.
- From the reception class, the learners are developing well their phonological awareness. As they progress they read aloud with increasing fluency and expression and can select key information from their books. However, their ability to read inferentially is under-developed. While the learners can write for information and can explain with good accuracy and awareness of grammatical conventions, given the school's commitment to broaden the curriculum, they would benefit from opportunities to write in a wider variety of genres and forms to prepare them effectively for further stages of study and learning.

- The older primary learners are accurate in their mathematical calculations and are confident in using mental mathematics strategies. It will be important to supplement the mathematics curriculum with more opportunities for the learners to apply mathematical concepts in real-life contexts and in problem-solving activities.
- The learners work independently at individual office stations, in a well-focused, conscientious and purposeful way through core curriculum PACE workbooks¹, and they are well supported in their independent study by the teachers and classroom assistants. The learners set their own daily goals, testing their progress at the end of each PACE unit and seeking help, and confirmation of their learning, from the staff when needed.
- In extended, often practical, learning activities, the learners engage in group work and problem-solving tasks and, through effective questioning by the teachers, develop well their information-handling and investigative skills.

4. Quality of provision

- All of the lessons observed were effective in progressing the learning. In the most effective practice, the teachers use a range of appropriate strategies, including effective questioning, to extend the learners' knowledge and understanding of their topic work. The staff in the foundation stage use practical resources, including multi-sensory materials, to develop the learners' manual dexterity and help them to acquire key concepts in literacy and numeracy.
- All of the lessons observed were characterised by warm, supportive working relationships based on trust and mutual respect. The teachers know the learners well, provide individualised support and promote the learners' independence through the extended learning programme.
- Based on the prior history of home education, the school relies for its core curriculum on the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE²) curriculum, a mastery, knowledge acquisition programme covering mathematics, science, social studies, word building, English, literature and creative writing, and Bible studies, all underpinned by beliefs and practices from Biblical scripture. In addition to the core curriculum, the general and advanced certificate learners may choose from a wide range of elective studies.
- Furthermore, the school sets out to supplement and broaden the ACE curriculum through a programme of extended learning, including for example, music, baking, French, Irish dancing, gardening and physical education in order to provide for the development of group-work, problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills.
- It is appropriate that the school leadership and governance is considering extending the curriculum offer and the range of qualifications, including for example GCSE and BTEC, in order to provide appropriate pathways to work-based learning, further education and higher education, based on the aptitude, interests and ability of individual pupils.

¹ PACE: Packets of Accelerated Christian Education divided into small achievable work-texts that allow students to work at their own pace.

² Accelerated Christian Education <https://aceministries.com>

- Through social, sport and leisure activities, both within the church and wider community of Ballynahinch, the learners have good opportunities for interaction with those from other schools. As a consequence, they mature well as confident, self-assured and highly articulate young people who have a considerable degree of care, concern and respect for each other, for the staff of the school and for the wider community.
- The individual education plans (IEPs) provide clear, practical strategies to help the teachers support those learners who require additional support in aspects of their learning. To ensure that the progress of the learners is assessed accurately, the school should ensure that the IEPs have a smaller number of measurable targets.
- The arrangements for the care and welfare of the learners are effective. They speak affirmatively about the fairness and benefits of the positive behaviour merit system which encourages taking responsibility for one's actions. The staff foster and live out a Christian culture and ethos of tolerance, respect and forgiveness.

5. Leadership and management

- In his role as chair of governors, the Pastor's outward looking vision has helped realise the wishes of the home educators in the church community to establish the school as a registered entity. He is very well-informed about the life and work of the school and has a close working relationship with the staff. He has a good knowledge of the safeguarding and child protection policies and their out-workings. Parental views are sought regularly and the parents play a very active role in the education of their children and young people.
- The teaching principal is highly professional and invested in ensuring the learners achieve to their full potential. She is proactive in sourcing support and training for staff and enhanced learning experiences for the pupils in the school's first year of registration. All of the staff work very effectively together and it is of note that almost all work in a voluntary capacity. They are highly dedicated to providing a value-based education for the young people. Their links with other schools which offer an ACE curriculum are complemented well through a wide range of contacts in the education service. Two of the staff have third level qualifications, one of whom has a teacher education qualification.

6. Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding learners reflect the guidance from the Department of Education. The school needs to ensure that the planned safeguarding and child protection training for the chair and the recently-appointed designated governor takes place at the agreed date.

In discussions with inspectors, the learners reported that they feel safe in school and know who to speak to if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

7. Conclusion

Harmony Christian School provides efficient and suitable instruction for the learners³.

The school should be registered by the Department of Education to provide education.

³ Education and Libraries Order (NI) 1986 Part IV 39 (1) c

Inspection guidance

The guide to inspection of independent schools is available at:

<https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/independent-schools-inspection-guidance>

Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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%

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