

EDUCATION AND TRAINING
INSPECTORATE

PRIMARY INSPECTION

Bunscoil agus Naíscoil Bheann Mhadagáin,
Béal Feirste/Belfast

DE Ref No 104-6596

Report of a Follow-up Inspection in May 2024



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Follow-up to the inspection of Bunscoil agus Naíscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, Béal Feirste/Belfast, BT14 6LA (104-6596)

Introduction

Bunscoil agus Naíscoil Bheann Mhadagáin is an Irish-medium primary school and nursery unit situated on the Cliftonville Road in North Belfast. The children who attend the school come mostly from the surrounding areas of Ardoyne and Ligoniel, and from the Cliftonville, Antrim and Cavehill Roads.

This follow-up inspection was carried out in May 2024 and provided the school with the opportunity to demonstrate its progress in addressing the areas for action from the time of the last full inspection in October 2016. A follow-up inspection took place in March 2018, which was impacted by action short of strike, and a monitoring visit took place in December 2021.

Almost two-thirds (7) of the current teaching staff have been appointed since the time of the last inspection. Over the same period, the number of children with special educational needs (SEN) has decreased by 14% and now stands at 75, 14 of whom have statements of SEN.

A permanent nurture facility, 'An Tearmann', opened in January 2017 and two additional classrooms and a sensory room have been built. The school was awarded by the Education Authority (EA) 'School of Sanctuary' status in 2019.

Views of parents, staff and children

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to the Rang 7 (year 7) children, and all parents and staff in advance of the follow-up inspection. A summary of all the responses, including any issues raised in the written comments was communicated to the principal and representatives of the board of governors.

All (25) of the children in year 7 responded to the online questionnaire and just under one-quarter (6) of the children provided written comments. The children all agree that there are adults in school that they can talk to if they have a problem, and almost all agree that they learn how to manage and express their emotions and receive helpful information about changes that happen as they grow and develop. They also agree that their lessons are interesting and challenging and that their teachers give helpful feedback on their work some, most or all of the time. Most of the children agree that the school encourages them to eat healthily and provides opportunities to exercise regularly, and that they are making good progress in their learning. In discussions with the inspectors, the children from year 7 spoke confidently in Irish about their enjoyment of school, how they feel very safe at school and the range of interesting learning experiences provided for them. They talked very positively about the supportive relationships at all levels.

Just under one-fifth (20) of the parents responded to the questionnaire and there were eight written comments. Almost all of the parents agree that their child is making good progress in their learning and that the school encourages the children to eat healthily and take regular exercise. Almost all of the parents report that they are content with the care and support given to their child and that their child has opportunities to take part in activities/visits outside the classroom and/or after school.

Eighteen members of staff (58%) completed the confidential questionnaire and there were a small number of written comments. The staff all agreed that they are clear on the school's vision and their work to achieve the vision, and that they have benefited from recent professional learning opportunities.

Key actions

The key actions which affect the work of the school are set out below.

- The EA has provided external support on:
 - aspects of whole-school improvement, including monitoring and evaluating, action planning and the role of coordinators; and
 - planning for high-quality learning and teaching, including, play-based learning, whole-school nurture and trauma-informed practices.
- The school has revised its approach to the school development planning process.
- The school has focused on embedding nurture (cothú) practices throughout the school.
- A revised whole-school approach to planning for learning and teaching has been introduced.
- The school has established whole-school literacy and numeracy working groups and has appointed co-ordinators for information and communication technology (ICT), SEN and early years.
- The school has developed partnerships with and visited other schools, both from within and beyond the Irish-medium sector.

Key findings

- The school development planning process is robust and meaningful and is informed by wide and effective consultation with staff, pupils, parents and governors. Work around this was progressing well, as noted at the time of ETI's monitoring visit to the school in November 2021, but was subsequently impacted by the most recent period of industrial action. The work is now back on track and there are detailed action plans in place to address current priorities which are supported by an appropriate programme of whole-staff professional learning.

- The governors are now more involved in, and informed about, the school development planning process and school improvement work. They have a clear understanding of the barriers to learning experienced by some pupils, including attendance, behaviour and special educational needs, and what the school is doing to help the learners overcome these barriers.
- The staff has a better understanding of, and use more effectively, assessment information and other data to inform planning for successful learning and to monitor children's progress. Processes for monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning and teaching and the standards achieved by the children have been re-established recently after the period of industrial action.
- A whole-school approach to medium-term planning for literacy and numeracy is informed appropriately by long-term curricular overviews. In the most effective planning for successful learning: evaluations of prior learning inform well the next stages; the intended learning is clear and appropriate; and ongoing evaluations of learning inform the provision for individual children. Going forward, it will be important to develop further the processes for monitoring and evaluating the quality of planning to ensure that this effective practice is consistent across the key stages, so that all children have equitable access to high-quality learning experiences and make progress in their learning.
- Nurture approaches are embedded throughout the school, helping the children to develop wider skills, confidence and self-esteem, and enabling staff to develop an inclusive approach to meeting the needs of all of the children. The positive impact of the nurture provision is clear across the key stages through the children's high levels of engagement, their behaviour and the interest they show in their learning. Working relationships within the classrooms are supportive and nurturing, as evidenced from observations of learning and teaching across all classes in the bunscoil and the naíscail (nursery unit), and discussions with children from year 7.
- A more collaborative approach to the coordination of key areas of learning is developing well through the establishment of the literacy and numeracy working groups and the appointment of new coordinators for ICT, SEN and early years who are supported appropriately by well-planned professional learning opportunities.

Child Protection

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Going Forward

The staff and leadership of Bunscoil agus Naíscoil Bheann Mhadagáin work well together to create a positive, welcoming and nurturing learning environment in line with their vision. The staff are committed to the wellbeing of the children and provide for them a safe and supportive learning environment. The children are well engaged, work well together and all types of achievements are celebrated.


ETI, through the engagement of the district inspector, will continue to work with Bunscoil agus Naíscoil Bheann Mhadagáin to take forward the area for action detailed in this report.

No further follow-up inspection is required.

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