

Report of an Independent School Re-registration Inspection

Harmony Christian School, Ballynahinch
DE Ref No IS103

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Throughout the report the use of an asterisk * denotes further information included at Appendix 2.

CONTEXT

Harmony Christian School is located within the New Testament Pentecostal Church buildings in Ballynahinch. It is an all-ability co-educational school for learners aged 4 to 18. The school has been in operation since initial registration in 2019. It is administered by the church trustees with operational management overseen by the principal, pastor and a church-appointed board of governors.

The Harmony Christian School vision is to deliver an excellent education within a faith-based Christian environment where the children are happy in school and are taught core and extended subjects. The school seeks to develop the pupils' learning in a safe and pleasant setting.

The children and young people attending the school either live in Ballynahinch town or are from the surrounding rural area. Since initial registration, enrolment has increased from 15 to a current figure of 31 pupils. The school buildings have undergone notable renovation to update and extend the teaching areas for the increase in pupil numbers. Consequently, the accommodation for the learners is of a very good standard.

Teaching is arranged across distinct groups: for children aged between four and six years old; the primary learning centre is for children from seven to eleven years old; and the senior learning centre is for post-primary children aged between eleven and sixteen years old.

The school is funded primarily by the church and fees from parents, fund-raising events, and other gifts and donations.

Statistical Information

Harmony Independent Christian School	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Enrolment	18	22	29	31
No. of pupils of primary school age	11	12	15	19
No. of pupils of post-primary school age (aged 11 to 16 years)	7	10	14	12
% Attendance for pupils	94.5%	96%	95%	N/A
FSME Percentage*	**	**	**	**
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.

* FSME refers to Free School Meals entitled pupils.

** fewer than 5

N/A Not available

FOCUS OF THE RE-REGISTRATION INSPECTION

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 for learning’) 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 in place, appropriate and 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 and appropriate, and there are processes in place for external assurance on fire and other safety equipment; and
- pupils access 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 for Northern Ireland or 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 and the pupils’ work and held discussions with teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

OUTCOMES FOR LEARNERS

The pupils are well motivated and engage well in their learning. They develop knowledge and apply communication and inter-personal skills at an individual pace through systematic and progressive learning activities in their Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum* booklets. The learners make good progress across the ACE curriculum with the support of their teachers. They are resilient and determined in completing their learning activities and manage and use information proficiently.

The learners work methodically through the series of sequential ACE topics, which develop well their knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects in the curriculum. Knowledge and understanding are assessed regularly and the pupils are secure in their learning. As they go through the school, the learners show commendable levels of independence and they routinely take responsibility for their learning. When faced with challenges, the pupils persist well; they also benefit from appropriate one-to-one support which helps them overcome difficulties.

In class, learners engage with each other and converse respectfully and confidently, demonstrating well-developed communication and oracy skills. Primary-aged pupils are involved in a range of active learning tasks, which encourage independent working and teamwork while fostering enjoyment in learning. The post-primary pupils are committed to their learning, show initiative and they possess good self-assessment routines. They skilfully offer each other sensitive, accurate and constructive peer assessment, which is focused on how to improve their work further.

Samples of the pupils' written work show that they make good progress in their learning. In the extended writing tasks made available for inspectors the work was well-presented and of a good quality demonstrating clear progression in learning.

The school has only been operational for five years and there are no external examination outcomes so far, because none of the pupils have reached the age where formal accreditation at Level 2 has taken place.

PROVISION FOR LEARNING

The school has seven staff and they attend in full-time and part-time capacities. Most staff hold third-level qualifications, with a small number possessing recognised teaching qualifications. The school provides effective instruction that caters for the needs of all pupils, who access full-time education from 8:55 am to 2:00 pm, or 3:15 pm, depending on their age and stage of learning.

A European model of the ACE curriculum forms the basis for the taught programmes and lesson structure which culminates in the award of Certificates of Christian Education. These qualifications are internationally recognised as level 2 (GCSE) and level 3 (A-level) equivalents.

The school embeds and celebrates success well. The teachers foster a supportive learning atmosphere, where pupils are motivated and encouraged through the positive rewards system. The pupils also benefit from regular praise and affirmations for good work, and they receive constructive feedback on their efforts to help them improve. This approach empowers the pupils to extend their learning and feel a sense of achievement.

Teachers encourage independence in thinking, and critical reflection, helping pupils to become more confident in their learning and in evaluating their own progress.

All of the lessons observed were effective. A purposeful atmosphere is maintained in the classrooms, where mutual respect between pupils and teachers supports a positive learning experience. Throughout the lessons observed, the pupils built upon their prior learning and applied their skills well, in areas such as: formal debating on an ethical topic, problem solving and in comprehension-style activities.

The school has strong links with the local church and community. Pupils participate in events such as performances for local residents, including care homes, and special church services. Educational trips, including visits to the north coast, and day excursions are used well to enhance pupils' learning experiences.

Shared learning experiences with home-schooled children and learners from other independent Christian schools have been hosted and facilitated by the school, for example a sports day, to broaden the pupils' access to extracurricular activities and opportunities to engage with other children.

Staff professional learning is prioritised and focused on being responsive to meeting the needs of pupils. The leaders have actively pursued training in areas such as autism, dyslexia, and in the use of technology to support further the pupils' learning. Around one-third of the staff have accessed and completed specialised training courses, led by the Education Authority, to better enable them to meet the needs of the children, particularly those in the primary classes.

CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING

At the time of the inspection, the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance. The school regularly updates its child protection and safeguarding policies to ensure they reflect the relevant guidance from health, education, and social services departments. Evidence was provided by the school that Access NI vetting has been carried out for all members of staff.

In discussions with the pupils attending the school, they know who they could go to if they have concerns about their health, safety or well-being. They discussed how, through the pastoral care curriculum, they understand the types of risks they might face, such as social media use and mobile phone safety and learn how to keep themselves safe.

ACCOMMODATION, EQUIPMENT AND RESOURCES, INCLUDING HEALTH AND SAFETY

The accommodation is suitable for the school's size and the age groups it serves. The school has in place a range of health and safety policies, including the emergency evacuation procedures, site security, and equipment testing. Risk assessments are completed in a range of areas including, for example, school visits, completing physical activities and school outings.

The learning environment is of a good standard. Classrooms are well equipped and are suitable for the delivery of the curriculum, including defined areas for independent study. Although physical exercise spaces are limited, the school has arrangements in place for additional physical activities and wider learning, including access to local church halls and regular supervised visits to Ballynahinch Library.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- All of the lessons observed were effective; they were well structured and met the pupils' individual abilities and needs across all stages of learning.
- Pupils are well supported and make good progress in their learning.

- The pupils are well motivated and engage well with staff and have positive dispositions to learning.
- The recently refurbished and extended school accommodation is bright and modern.
- There are appropriate child protection and safeguarding procedures in place.
- There are purposeful community links and opportunities for pupils to engage with others.
- Staff engage in appropriate professional learning to meet better the needs of the pupils.

CONCLUSION

Harmony Independent Christian School provides a safe, supportive, and motivating learning environment. The school offers a personalised approach to education, which meets well the needs of pupils at the various stages of learning.

The school continues to develop and refine its provision and achieve its vision in delivering faith-based Christian education to its pupils, ensuring that they are supported in their learning and personal growth and are happy within a safe school environment.

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 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: INFORMATION ON ACCELERATED CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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ACE curriculum

A European model of the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum forms the basis for the taught programmes and lesson structure which culminates in the award of Certificates of Christian Education.

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