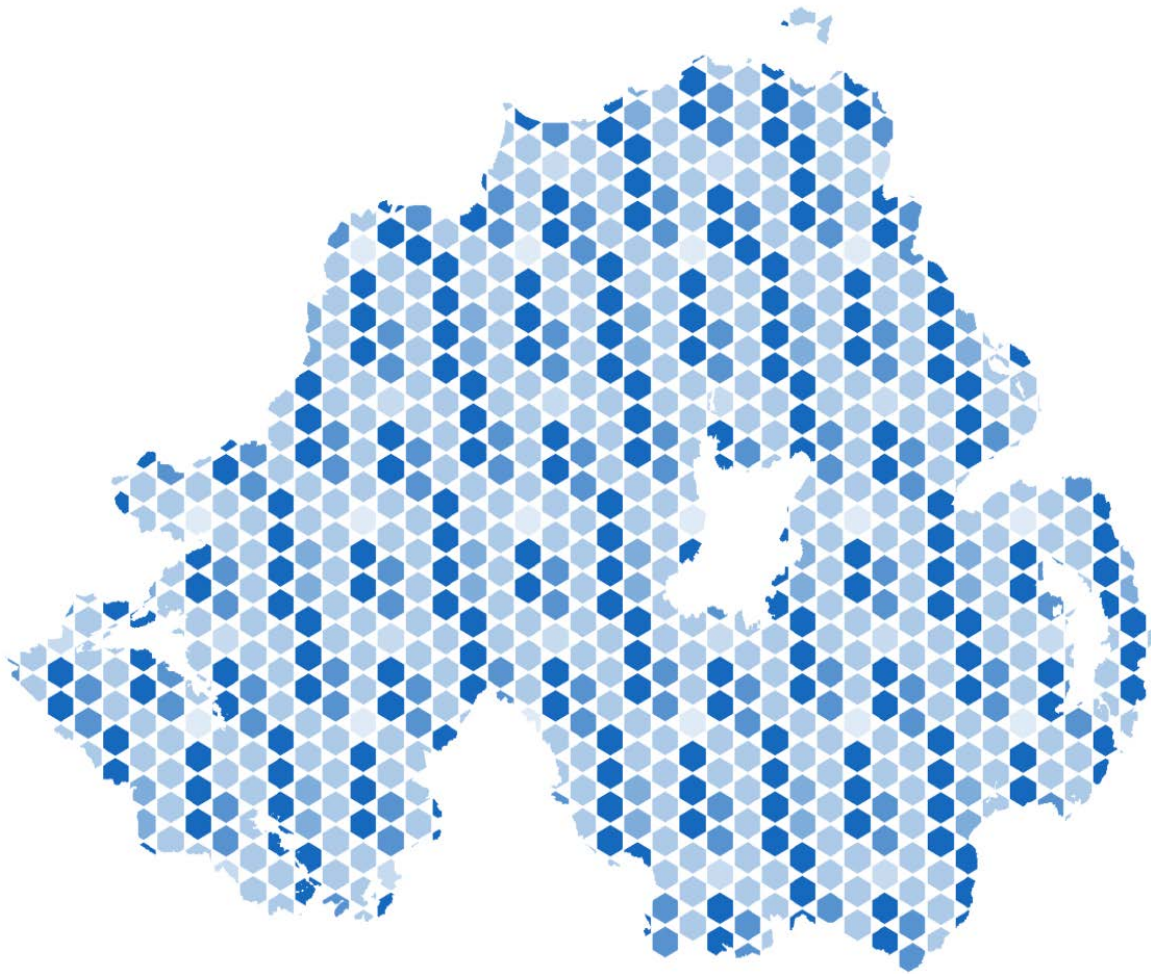


SPECIAL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Buddy Bear Trust Conductive
Education Independent School,
Dungannon

Report of an Inspection
in February 2013



CONTENTS

Section	Page
1. School context	1
2. Focus of the inspection	1
3. Overall findings of the inspection	1
4. Key findings of the inspection	2
5. Conclusion	3

Inspection methods and evidence base

The inspection evaluations are based on evidence gained from observing the children in class over the course of a day, from analysis of their responses to a range of curriculum activities, and from a scrutiny of the comprehensive documentation, including video evidence, provided by the school. In addition, the inspection team held discussions with the principal, parents and with two representatives of the Buddy Bear Trust.

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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

Performance Level	Descriptor
Outstanding	Outstanding characterised by excellence
Very Good	Consistently good; major strengths
Good	Important strengths in most of the provision. Areas for improvement which organisation has the capacity to address
Satisfactory	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed
Inadequate	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action
Unsatisfactory	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent action

1. School context

1.1 The Buddy Bear Trust Conductive Education School is an independent school registered with the Department of Education (DE) and under the management of the Buddy Bear Trust, a charitable company established to promote conductive education. The school is situated in Dungannon and provides full-time education for three children, aged 4 to 8 years, and for eleven children who attend every two weeks for a one hour session. A further five children are supported on request from their parents. The children have significant difficulties associated with cerebral palsy, severe learning difficulties and additional medical conditions.

1.2 The school provides a specialist curriculum programme based on the principles of conductive education and adapted to address the children's complex learning needs, multi-sensory and communication development.

1.3 This inspection completes work that began in January 2012. The inspection was incomplete at that stage due to action being taken by the staff not to co-operate with the Education and Training Inspectorate on advice from their teaching union.

1.4 The previous inspection in November 2004, raised concerns about the viability of the school given the small numbers of pupils enrolled. All concerned with the school remain concerned about the long term future of the provision.

School Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Enrolments	2	2	3	3	3
Attendance	56%	58%	61%	67%	69%
Teachers***	1	1	1	1	1
Classroom assistants	2	2	2	2	2
Percentage of children entitled to free school meals					N/A

*** The principal is the only teacher and she combines the role of principal with that of teacher/conductor

2. Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on the requirement of the school to demonstrate that the curriculum is suitably relevant and balanced to meet the individual needs of the children. In addition, the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection, were evaluated.

3. Overall findings of the inspection

In the areas inspected in this school, the quality of education is good and pastoral care is outstanding. The school has important strengths in most of its educational provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

The viability of the school remains a significant issue and action to address this is crucial.

Achievements and standards	good
Quality of Provision	good
Leadership and management	good

4. Key findings of the inspection

4.1 The quality of the children's achievements and standards is good.

The children on admission to the school have significant difficulties and are highly dependent on their parents and the staff of the school to meet their basic needs. Over time, each child makes very good progress from their starting points, and achievements, though significantly behind that of their typically developing peers, are nevertheless notable and celebrated. Turning to hear a sound, pressing a toy to enjoy its movement, giving attention to interesting activities or communicating their likes and dislikes are common testament to the children's development. Significantly, improved muscle tone and strength and increased independent movement provide a particular delight to the children and their parents.

During the inspection, the children:

- engaged in a variety of activities;
- participated actively as a group in play;
- gave eye contact in response to familiar sounds and voices;
- demonstrated their sense of safety when interacting with the teacher and assistants; and
- enjoyed working with personal digital devices.

4.2 The quality of the provision for learning is good.

The curriculum planning is very child centred and thorough. The targets and yearly objectives set for the children direct the daily programme and are constantly monitored and reported to parents who take an active part in supporting the teaching programme. Teaching sessions are of a good quality as they focus on the children's physical development and communication skills. The teacher and assistants work together well to create a warm and pleasant atmosphere in a well heated and visually attractive classroom environment. An excellent ethos is evident which underpins all activities and supports learning.

Key features include:

- the strong focus on target setting, tracking progress and outcomes;
- the collaborative working with parents and sharing of practical and important information about the children;
- the busy pace of the day and good attention to the children's wellbeing; and
- the principal's expertise in, and understanding of, motor development which she demonstrates effectively in all activities.

The principal would benefit from planned opportunities for professional dialogue with teachers working with children with similar needs in other schools.

4.3 The quality of leadership and management is good.

The principal provides good leadership in effecting improvement in the children's learning and the standards they attain. The assistants benefit from the example and advice the principal provides which emphasises the sharing of good practice and meticulous recording of progress. The parents transport their children to and from the school and remain in the school due to the long distance they travel daily and because of the acute medical needs of some of the children. As a consequence of their presence in the school each day, the parents are well informed about their children's progress and are fully aware of the range of activities the children follow. The Trust members are fully supportive of the work of the school and make a very positive contribution to its life and work.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children; these arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE). In discussions with the parents, they indicated that they know the arrangements and policy if they have any concerns about their children's well-being.

Notwithstanding the good leadership of the principal, the efforts of the Trust to secure a strategic plan and working strategy with the Southern Education and Library Board have not been reached. All concerned with the school remain worried about the children's long term education and the pressure imposed by constant fund raising.

The inspection team would recommend that Buddy Bear Trust, the Education and Library Boards and Department of Education special education officials explore the possibility of collaborative working between the school and its neighbouring special school, in particular, the ways in which staff skills can be utilised in a complementary way for the benefit of those pupils whose greatest needs can be best met through a programme which provides intensive and constant support for their therapeutic development.

5. Conclusion

In the areas inspected in this school, the quality of education is good and pastoral care is outstanding. The school has important strengths in most of its educational provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

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