# Cliftonville Primary wins international recognition for fostering multilingualism and inclusivity



Cliftonville Integrated Primary School in north Belfast is proving that diversity can be a powerful asset in education. With over 400 pupils and a mosaic of cultures represented by 17 different languages spoken within its walls, the school has successfully embraced this multicultural backdrop, earning the prestigious British Council’s International School Award for the period of 2024-2027. This accolade positions Cliftonville as the only recipient of such recognition in Northern Ireland, celebrating its commitment to inclusivity and global awareness in the classroom.

Principal Bill Fletcher emphasised the unique challenges posed by the school’s diverse linguistic landscape. While a significant proportion of students hail from the local community, many others come from across the globe, often arriving with little to no English. “There are challenges in the sense that if you have children coming in who have no English, that’s difficult for the teachers,” he noted, highlighting the need for additional support from the Department of Education. Despite these obstacles, the school has taken proactive steps, including employing a dedicated international coordinator and offering English classes facilitated by an English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher.

Mr Fletcher advocated for the introduction of more comprehensive support systems, such as intensive English courses for newcomers, to help with the integration process. He explained that while many children adapt quickly to their new environment, some may require more structured assistance to fully engage with the curriculum and their peers. Currently, around 16% of students are classified as having an EAL background, with initiatives in place to ensure they receive the necessary support. “We have six designated school ambassadors who help integrate new children, promoting an environment of inclusivity,” he added.

The school's efforts to cultivate a multilingual atmosphere have not gone unnoticed. North Belfast MP John Finucane was present at the award reception in Westminster and expressed his pride in the school’s accomplishments, stating, “It’s fantastic to see that they’ve been honoured for the amazing work they do.” He underscored the importance of exposure to multiple cultures in fostering empathy and understanding among students, suggesting that the school serves as an exemplary model of how to successfully integrate international perspectives into education.

Students are actively engaged in this ethos of inclusion. Nine-year-old Victoria Chen, an international ambassador, articulated her role in welcoming new pupils and ensuring they feel at home. Her classmate Charlotte Ogunleye echoed these sentiments, sharing how learning about different cultures has enriched her educational experience, particularly in her Mandarin studies. “I can see patterns in other languages,” she observed, reflecting the interconnectedness of language learning and cultural appreciation.

This focus on cultural exchange is echoed across the region, as schools in Northern Ireland become increasingly diverse; recent reports indicate that nearly 90 first languages are now spoken in local schools. The rising number of newcomer students—over 5,000 in the past five years—reflects broader demographic shifts influenced by migration patterns. As educational institutions like Cliftonville Integrated Primary adapt to these changes, they play a pivotal role in preparing children for a multicultural world.

The British Council chose Cliftonville for the launch of its language trends report for 2025, which identified Spanish as the most popular language in local schools but also highlighted a trend of reluctance among students to pursue language studies at a qualifications level. Dr Ian Collen, author of the report, praised Cliftonville as a “linguist melting pot” and as a model for other schools, highlighting the shared cultural experiences that foster understanding among students.

As Cliftonville Integrated Primary continues to champion both local and international insights, it not only enriches the lives of its students but also sets a benchmark for other educational establishments to aspire to in fostering inclusivity and celebrating diversity within the classroom.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/it-really-is-a-melting-pot-belfast-primary-school-where-17-languages-are-spoken-wins-international-award/a769977429.html), [[2]](https://www.cliftonvilleps.co.uk/curriculum/international-links/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/it-really-is-a-melting-pot-belfast-primary-school-where-17-languages-are-spoken-wins-international-award/a769977429.html), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-43211979), [[4]](https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/profiles-schools-sanctuary)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/it-really-is-a-melting-pot-belfast-primary-school-where-17-languages-are-spoken-wins-international-award/a769977429.html), [[6]](https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2024-01-12/children-try-foods-from-across-the-world-as-belfast-school-celebrates-diversity)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/it-really-is-a-melting-pot-belfast-primary-school-where-17-languages-are-spoken-wins-international-award/a769977429.html), [[2]](https://www.cliftonvilleps.co.uk/curriculum/international-links/), [[3]](https://www.cliftonvilleprimary.co.uk/british-school-values/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/it-really-is-a-melting-pot-belfast-primary-school-where-17-languages-are-spoken-wins-international-award/a769977429.html), [[7]](https://www.cliftonvilleps.co.uk/curriculum/shared-education/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/it-really-is-a-melting-pot-belfast-primary-school-where-17-languages-are-spoken-wins-international-award/a769977429.html), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-43211979), [[4]](https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/profiles-schools-sanctuary)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/it-really-is-a-melting-pot-belfast-primary-school-where-17-languages-are-spoken-wins-international-award/a769977429.html), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-43211979)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/it-really-is-a-melting-pot-belfast-primary-school-where-17-languages-are-spoken-wins-international-award/a769977429.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cliftonvilleps.co.uk/curriculum/international-links/> - Cliftonville Integrated Primary School in Belfast celebrates its international culture by welcoming pupils from all religions and beliefs. The school was awarded the British Council’s International School Award in recognition of its efforts to bring the world into the classroom. This award honours schools that excel in international education. The school's international initiatives include forming partnerships with countries such as Canada, Norway, Belgium, Madrid, and Romania, providing pupils with an informed awareness of various countries, cultures, and languages. These projects have led to the school receiving the prestigious International School Award.
3. <https://www.cliftonvilleprimary.co.uk/british-school-values/> - Cliftonville Primary & Pre-School in Belfast educates and provides boundaries for young pupils to make choices safely through a safe environment and empowering education. The school explores seeing others’ opinions and expressing feelings in lessons, including character ‘hot-seating’ in literacy. E-safety lessons teach children about respecting their own and others’ privacy, the negative impact of cyberbullying, and exercising freedoms to communicate electronically wisely and safely. Children are encouraged to know, understand, and exercise their rights and personal freedom safely through various lessons and activities.
4. <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/profiles-schools-sanctuary> - The Executive Office in Northern Ireland profiles schools that have achieved School of Sanctuary status, recognising them as welcoming and inclusive places for newcomer children and their families. Cliftonville Integrated Primary is among the schools that have completed profiles, highlighting their commitment to providing a safe and inclusive environment for all pupils, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-43211979> - According to a report by the Department of Education, schools in Northern Ireland are becoming more ethnically diverse, with about 90 different first languages spoken by pupils. The number of 'newcomer' students has risen by over 5,000 in five years, representing 4.4% of the school population. This growth in diversity may be explained by increased levels of migration among school-age children over the last number of years.
6. <https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2024-01-12/children-try-foods-from-across-the-world-as-belfast-school-celebrates-diversity> - Finaghy Primary School in south Belfast celebrated its cultural diversity by hosting an evening of food, song, and dance from countries across the world. Over 25 languages are spoken in the classroom by children whose families have moved to Northern Ireland. Parents representing countries from as close as France to as far away as Saudi Arabia opened stalls where children could sample foods from their country and play games. The international diversity night also involved performances from Irish dancers to traditional Filipino dancing.
7. <https://www.cliftonvilleps.co.uk/curriculum/shared-education/> - Cliftonville Integrated Primary School offers pupils Shared Education experiences through the Peace IV programme. In partnership with Abbots Cross Primary School, they create and deliver fun, stimulating lessons to enhance Numeracy, Literacy, and STEM knowledge and skills. The project enables children to develop their knowledge across the curriculum and forge friendships with children from various backgrounds, promoting diversity and inclusion within the school community.