

EDUCATION OTHER THAN AT SCHOOL INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Secondary Pupil Support
Service
The Link Centre, Belfast

Report of an Inspection
in November 2014



Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



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%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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1. Inspection method and evidence base

Inspectors observed teaching and learning, scrutinised documentation and the young peoples' written work and held formal and informal discussions with the young people, and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with representatives from the Link Centre management group;
- discussions with groups of young people; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	10	10	100	6
Teachers	8	8	100	7
Support Staff	6	6	100	*

* fewer than 5

All of the parental questionnaire responses are positive. The parents value the progress made by the young people and the caring and supportive ethos throughout the centre. There were no areas of concern and additional comments were very supportive and positive of the staff and the centre. The teacher and support staff questionnaire responses are very positive, and indicate strong support for management and work of the centre although there were a small number of areas of concern. The Education and Training Inspectorate reported to the head of service and representatives of the management group, the small number of areas of concern emerging from the questionnaire and, where appropriate, these have been commented on within the report.

2. Context

The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) Secondary Pupil Support Service (SPSS) is situated at the Link Centre (Centre), Barrack Street, Belfast. The SPSS provides advice to 17 schools in Belfast on the management of secondary mainstream school pupils aged 11-16 with social emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). The centre provides part time placements for two days each week within a small group setting for five key stage 3 (KS3) pupils and five key stage 4 (KS4) pupils each term and outreach support to individual pupils and small groups who require additional support to help them maintain their mainstream school placements. In addition, individual pupils may also attend the centre for complementary relaxation therapy support to help them deal with anxiety issues or bespoke education programmes. Additional support programmes are provided through a young man's group and a young women's group for school age young people.

The Link Centre	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Enrolment	23	24	24	23
FSME Percentage ¹	-	-	87	63
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	*

Source: data as held by the centre.

* indicates a number fewer than 5

3. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the young peoples' achievements and outcomes;
- the quality of provision; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

4. Overall finding

Overall Performance Level	Outstanding
Achievements and Outcomes	Outstanding
Provision	Outstanding
Leadership and Management	Outstanding

Key findings of the inspection

5. Achievements and outcomes

- All of the young people supported by the SPSS have social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Most of the young people who attend the centre for part time placement respond well to the supportive learning environment and positive ethos that permeates all aspects of the life of the centre. By the time the young people leave the centre, the majority have developed better dispositions towards learning and have significantly improved their behaviour; tolerance of others and ability to work effectively, independently and as part of a team.
- Analysis of the data provided by the service indicates that 686 young people benefited from support by the service during the last school year. The 686 young people included group support for 329 young people within mainstream schools and outreach service support to 274 young people of whom 95% have successfully maintained their school placements. The centre provided part time placements for twenty three young people last year including fourteen KS3 pupils nine of whom have successfully maintained their school placement with five referred to Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision. There were nine young people in KS4 in attendance, seven of those have maintained their placements in school with two referred to EOTAS.

¹ The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

- Most of the young people respond well to the highly individualised programmes of support in numeracy and literacy. The evidence in the young people's books indicates variety and progression in their learning with increasing competence and flexibility in their mathematical thinking and literacy skills development.
- All of the young people have successfully completed Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) unit awards in a range of subjects including English personal writing, life and social skills, mathematics money matters, handling data, employability, art, information communication technology and home economics. In total the 23 young people successfully completed 281 AQA awards. For the KS4 young people the AQA awards were in addition to their GCSE qualifications completed in school. The AQA unit awards can be achieved after short periods of study and are used by the centre to develop the self-esteem and confidence of reluctant learners.
- The centre carefully monitors the progress of all of the young people who have been in receipt of support and reviews their progress continually for up to one year after formal support has ended. The outreach teachers and support assistants continue to monitor the progress, behaviour and learning of the young people when they are in the schools and ongoing support can be put in place if required.

6. Provision

- All of the staff work hard to develop positive relationships with parents, carers and the young people based on tolerance and mutual respect. The staff has high expectations of the young people and deploy a supportive empathetic approach which helps to reduce interruptions to learning in the classroom. There is a clear emphasis on positive behaviour management.
- The youth workers quickly establish excellent working relationships with the young people. They provide valuable support and relevant programmes which complement the planned intervention provided by the centre and the referring schools. The youth workers are non-judgemental and empathic; and encourage the young people to maximise the benefits of their placement in preparation for re-integration back to school on a full time basis.
- The quality of teaching was always very good or outstanding in all of the lessons observed, with 30% of the lessons evaluated as outstanding. The teachers are enthusiastic, hard-working and knowledgeable about the young people and the subjects they teach. They plan effectively and are innovative in finding topics and themes that interest and engage the young people. They work effectively with the support assistants who make effective interventions with individual young people.
- The teachers employ effective strategies to manage the behaviour of the young people; build their self esteem and ensure they learn effectively. They are patient and tolerant, have high expectations of the young people and work hard to ensure that they can succeed and understand the lessons. As a result, the young people learn how to manage their behaviour and grow in confidence in their own ability. Over time the young people develop very good working relationships with all staff and are well prepared to re engage fully with mainstream schooling.

- There is an appropriate baseline assessment of each young person based on reports provided by the school psychologist. The curriculum is well matched to the individual needs, interests and aspirations of the young people. There is an appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy in all lessons as most of the young people require additional support in these key areas. The young people benefit from the accelerated reading and linguistic phonics programmes. The teachers find interesting ways to engage the young people such as AQA unit awards in handling mathematical data using Spanish, personal writing and discussion and creating newspaper articles on topics such as Titanic in literacy classes and developing good social skills in community relations equality and diversity (CRED) classes.
- The staff use Information Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance learning when possible and have recently acquired Apple I pads for use with the young people. The further development of the use of ICT is appropriately a priority identified in the service strategic development plan alongside training in the C2k system to be installed soon.
- The young people benefit from a well-structured employability programme and have access to relevant careers information. The young people in key stage 4 visit local companies and can avail of work placements arranged by the head of service who has developed effective links with "business in the community," and local employers.
- The SPSS provides an outreach service to young people in 17 post-primary schools in the Belfast area. The young people are referred by the school with a view to supporting them to progress in their learning and maintain their placement within mainstream schools. The quality of the teaching observed was always very good and in a few instances outstanding. The teachers have excellent working relationships with the young people. They provide solution focused support and adapt their lessons to provide for the needs of the young person.
- There is an appropriate focus on healthy eating and lifestyle choices. The young people benefit from a breakfast club and are encouraged to sample the fresh fruit provided at break times. Home economics classes focus on healthy eating, home and family life and independent living. Whilst the physical education classes provide an opportunity for them to experience a number of physical activities. The young people can avail of weekly relaxation sessions with a trained therapist and benefit from individual support each week from an educational psychologist.
- The staff adopt a holistic approach to the development of the young people and have developed an innovative and successful "Home link "programme designed to promote improved relationships between the young people and their parents/carers. The parents/carers are invited into the centre on three occasions during the term to engage with their young person on a practical activity or a social event. To date the programme has included cookery, screen printing, relaxation therapy, Heart mathematics programme, educational visits and consultation, for example on the centre's anti-bullying policy.

- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is outstanding. The inclusive and supportive ethos of the centre provides an excellent basis to enable and support the young people in their learning and re-integration back to school. The centre provides a conducive and stimulating learning environment where the young people feel respected, challenged and valued. The young people reported that they feel safe, and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and well-being. They also identified the value of learning and experiencing coping strategies to anticipate and manage difficult and stressful situations.
- There is an effective reward system in place for those young people who attend the centre. Points are awarded for behaviour and effort with very clear criteria on how to achieve. The young people are involved in deciding what points they should be awarded each lesson and the process is effective in enabling them to reflect and take responsibility for their behaviour and learning.
- The parents/carers are provided with weekly written reports for those young people on partial placement in the centre. The teachers are effective in setting targets for behaviour and learning with the individual young people, however to improve further; the school, parent, young person and SPSS staff should agree the intended outcomes for the placement at the initial planning meeting. Those outcomes would then become the priorities for each young person to focus on and for teachers to devise strategies to empower the young person to achieve by the end of their placement. In addition, better communication from schools in sharing information in relation to progress in school, mathematics, English schemes and lessons to ensure continuity and progression for those pupils on partial placements would improve the provision in these areas.
- The teachers meet each afternoon to review the progress of each young person and meticulously record the strategies that have been effective in supporting the young people in their learning and managing their behaviour. They have access to continued professional development opportunities and are well supported by the BELB Senior Educational Psychologist assigned to the centre.

7. Leadership and management

- The head of service provides outstanding leadership and clear, realistic direction based on a sound knowledge of and vision for the service. He inspires confidence and respect among the staff and fosters distributed leadership. There is a culture of self evaluation and review with opportunities provided each day to reflect on, share and record success strategies that have engaged the young people. The senior teachers work effectively as a team to support the coordinators in developing policies and plans to develop the provision and ensure the young people improve their life chance and enhance their educational outcomes.

- The senior management team have consulted a wide range of stakeholders including young people to research and set priorities for the new service strategic development plan for the next three years. The plan clearly outlines the strategic aims and key areas for development. The senior management are very effective and continually strive to improve the provision and provide time each week for all staff to reflect and review their practice and how best to support the young people they have been assigned to. The management and outreach teachers are very effective in identifying good practice by the referring schools in supporting young people with SEBD. The SPSS facilitates a “sharing good practice” event each year where schools with best practice can share their work with all schools in receipt of support.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection the organisation has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the relevant Department.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the parents, staff and wider community can have a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. It is clear that the management group comprising BELB officers and a parent’s representative are very well informed and actively engaged in the life and work of the SPSS. They have a well developed; effective partnership and working relationship with the head of service and systematic processes are in place to monitor and evaluate the SPSS provision.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the service is outstanding. The service is meeting effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the young people; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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