



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
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Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Education and Training Inspectorate

The Management and Quality of Provision for Pupils in Alternative Education Provision in the Western Education and Library Board

Inspected: November 2009

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond 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:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Altnagelvin Hospital School and Tuition Service, and the Laurel Centre provide alternative education provision (AEP) for pupils who have medical, social, emotional or behavioural difficulties and are unable to have their needs met in mainstream schools. Most of the pupils are referred to the provision as a result of challenging behaviour and have a history of multiple suspensions or poor school attendance. A minority presents with mental health issues and a significant minority holds statements of special educational needs. Nearly all of the pupils entering the provision have levels of attainment well below average: for a minority, attainment is exceptionally low. A minority has been absent from school for considerable periods and the majority has low self-esteem and confidence. Boys make up the majority of the referrals across the provision. The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) provides overall governance for out-of school provision which includes AEP.

1.2 The Laurel Centre is situated in Maydown, Londonderry and provides educational guidance and support to post-primary pupils in the centre and in post-primary schools in the Londonderry district, Limavady and Dungiven areas. In addition, the centre provides a six-week Transition Programme to year 8 pupils who find it difficult to settle into post-primary school.

1.3 Altnagelvin Hospital School and Tuition Service provides educational support to pupils with medical conditions, aged 4-16 years, in the Altnagelvin Area Hospital and in the community. The service also provides AEP to pupils aged 11-16 years in various settings in Londonderry, Enniskillen, Limavady, Omagh and Strabane. The provision is administered from a base in Altnagelvin Area Hospital.

1.4 Both providers offer provision in Londonderry and Limavady.

1.5 The overall provision which employs some 60 staff (permanent/casual/part- and full-time) costs an approximate £2.5m. The trend over the past three years indicates that the number of referrals to the provision is noticeably higher at key stage (KS) 4 than KS3.

1.6 At the time of the inspection, some 187 pupils were receiving support across the provision (140 in Altnagelvin Hospital School and Tuition Service). The number of children in the hospital receiving tuition was two. A further 40 pupils were participating in the Laurel Centre's Transition Programme. One of the three senior teachers in the Altnagelvin Hospital School and Tuition Service was absent and the newly appointed Vice-principal carried out this work and was unable to assume fully his work as Vice-principal.

1.7 The focus of the inspection was on the achievements and standards achieved by the pupils, the quality of the provision for learning, the leadership and management of the provision and the arrangements for child protection and pastoral care.

1.8 Prior to the inspection, a confidential questionnaire was issued to the parents/carers of the pupils and to the teachers and support staff, seeking their views on the effectiveness of the pastoral and educational provision.

1.9 One hundred and thirty parental questionnaires were issued to the parents in Altnagelvin Hospital School and Tuition Service: 21% were returned to the Department of Education (DE) and 14 of these contained additional written comments. The very positive responses from the parents indicate that they appreciate the care and support provided for their children/young people; many of the written responses refer to the children's/young

people's improved behaviour and sense of enjoyment; one parent, whose response was indicative of the responses, wrote, *"my son is a much happier person, before he was so worried about school you couldn't get a word out of him and nothing seemed to make him happy"*. The very few issues arising from the parental questionnaires were shared with the Principal.

1.10 A majority of the teaching staff responded to the online teacher questionnaire. The responses were positive about most aspects of the provision, though concern was voiced about the level of resource in one centre and the difficulties of communicating effectively across the centres.

1.11 Thirty-two parental questionnaires were issued to the parents in the Laurel Centre: 50% were returned to DE and two contained additional written comments. The responses were all very positive: one parent wrote, *"thanks to them my son is getting the education he needs"*. The majority of the teaching staff responded to the online questionnaire and expressed very positive views of the work of the centre and of the strong sense of team-work. The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) endorse the positive findings of the responses to both providers.

1.12 The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in AEP is very good. Among the strengths are the very good working relationships between the staff and the pupils, and the staff's detailed knowledge of, and empathy with the pupils and their needs. There are good arrangements in place for safeguarding the pupils and child protection arrangements are comprehensive, very good and managed effectively. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by DE.

1.13 The Inspectorate held interviews with the head of each provision, the Vice-principal of the Altnagelvin Hospital School and Tuition Service, the Acting Team Leader of the Laurel Centre, the senior teachers and members of staff. The Assistant Senior Education Officer of the WELB was interviewed in relation to her role in the management of the provision. As part of the inspection, various materials and education policies were examined and evaluated, including the pastoral care and child protection policy, the development plans for each organisation, the pupils' individual education plans, assessment and attendance records and curriculum documents. The inspectors observed 43 lessons across the various centres.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 During their time in AEP, the pupils' academic achievements remain below average but the majority make good progress in relation to their starting points. A few make excellent progress. Almost all of the pupils gain accreditation, including short course awards, entry level 3 qualifications and General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSEs) at various grades; a small minority who complete their studies fail to complete the examinations. Almost all of the pupils improve their self-esteem and personal and social skills and have aspirations to gain further qualifications and employment. Most of the pupils readily acknowledge that had it not been for AEP they would not be in education.

2.2 In 2008-09 a majority of the KS4 pupils across the provision progressed to further education. In addition, approximately 75% of KS3 pupils in the Laurel Centre in 2008-09 re-integrated successfully into their mainstream schools but disappointingly some 35% are re-referred to KS4 out-of-school provision. This high level of re-referrals raises the question of the mainstream schools' capacity to sustain appropriate provision and a level of commitment to these young people. A minority of the pupils at risk of marginalisation in mainstream schools cope better in AEP.

2.3 Attendance rates across the provision vary considerably: the majority of the pupils improve their attendance; a small minority do not improve their attendance while in the provision. It is a matter of concern that increasing numbers of pupils at KS4 fail to complete their KS4 mainstream education.

2.4 The key performance indicators of the pupils' achievements and standards are:

- the good working relationships established between the pupils and the staff;
- the pupils' improving behaviour and positive attitudes to learning;
- the pupils' willingness to develop their personal and social skills with almost all achieving accreditation; and
- the pupils' improved confidence in their ability to learn and re-engage with education.

3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 The overall quality of teaching in the lessons observed was satisfactory and in the majority of instances, was good or very good. In a small minority of lessons, the teachers' engagement with the pupils was outstanding and, as a consequence, the outcomes for the pupils were very good. The excellent personal and social aspects of most of the teaching made a significant contribution to improving the pupils' behaviour and encouraging their responsibility for learning.

3.2 In the more effective practice, the strengths of the teaching and learning included:

- the effective team working and excellent focus on empathy, enabling the pupils to express and develop their emotional states;
- the staff's detailed knowledge of the pupils and their needs;
- the excellent use of very probing questions and in-depth discussion between staff and pupils;
- the non-judgemental learning ethos; and
- in some instances, the excellent use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance the learning.

3.3 In a small number of instances where the teaching was less effective, the lesson planning was limited and the teaching approach was narrow.

3.4 In order to effect improvement, shared planning and discussion about target-setting should be developed. The pupils need to develop further their ability to work collaboratively with their peers and to sustain their progress through better involvement in the development of their education plans.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

AT SCHOOL/CENTRE LEVEL

4.1 The Principal of Altnagelvin Hospital School and Tuition Service and the Teacher Co-ordinator of the Laurel Centre provide good leadership and ensure that the provision runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Both leaders bring important skills and expertise to the AEP area; they have established a non-judgmental and welcoming ethos for learning which is shared by all staff and appreciated by the parents.

4.2 The senior teachers in both provisions carry out their work with care and have established a good working relationship with the parents and local schools. The link between the Strabane AEP and the neighboring special school is a good example of effective collaborative working; the pupils in both provisions enjoy the experience and are developing appropriate social skills and attitudes. The transition programme for post-primary schools provides year 8 pupils with additional support to settle into their school; this programme could be considered by mainstream schools at year 7 and more widely available as a preparation for transfer to the post-primary sector.

4.3 The educational arrangements across the provision are effective in engaging the pupils in learning and providing accreditation pathways for the pupils. However, in the Altnagelvin Hospital School and Tuition Service the Principal is responsible for almost all of the work in monitoring and evaluating progress. In many ways this practice limits the potential that a greater team approach could have. The senior teachers in this provision should be more involved in collating and analysing the data on pupil progress to inform future planning for learning and promote consistency within their centre and across the provision.

4.4 Monitoring the breadth of what is offered to the pupils, the appropriateness and quality of the accreditation and the links with mainstream schools vary across the provision. It would be best if a common approach to these areas was agreed across the WELB and shared with the schools.

AT WELB LEVEL

4.5 The overall governance and structure of the out-of-school provision has a number of shortcomings relating to:

- the duplication of provision across both providers and the lack of clarity among mainstream schools on the admission and the referral criteria;
- the lack of clarity around how the AEP service relates to the other services of the WELB, especially the behaviour support service; and
- the high number of referrals at KS4 to AEP.

4.6 The evidence indicates the need for a clear review and rationalisation by the WELB and ultimately the Education and Skills Authority, of the AEP services and other related services in order to create a common approach which can be shared with schools. The links between schools and AEP could also be strengthened to ensure that mainstream schools assume greater responsibility for the outcomes of their pupils who are enrolled in AEP.

4.7 The Altnagelvin Hospital School is no longer viable as children do not remain in hospital beyond five days: educational support for children in the hospital or recuperating at home should be re-considered and provided by the tuition service on a needs basis.

5. **CONCLUSION**

5.1 Altnagelvin Hospital School and Tuition Service and the Laurel Centre provide a good education, with outstanding pastoral care and support to its pupils.

5.2 Overall, the inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in the governance and structure of the provision which need to be addressed if the needs of the pupils across the WELB are to be met more effectively.

The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the progress in addressing the areas for improvement.

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