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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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**Department of Education**  
**Department for Employment and Learning**  
**Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

## **Education and Training Inspectorate**

### **Report of an Inspection**

#### **Alternative Education Provision**

**Education by Choice Centre**  
**The Bridge Community Association**  
**Belfast**

**Inspected: March 2007**

## CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	1
3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING	2
4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	2
5. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS	2
6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT	2
7. CONCLUSION	3

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Education by Choice Centre (Centre) is situated in Roslyn Youth Centre, Roslyn Street, Belfast. It has been operating since 2001 as an out-of-school, community based alternative education provision catering for up to 12 young people aged 14-16 years, who have been disengaged from mainstream education and are at risk of social and educational marginalisation. In most cases, the young people had been out of mainstream school for some months before admission to the Centre. At the time of the inspection the one qualified teacher employed at the Centre was absent on maternity leave. The two staff members currently employed are tutors with experience and qualifications mainly in youth work settings.

1.2 The young people attend daily and follow a narrow curriculum focusing on English, mathematics, information and communication technology and personal and social development.

1.3 The Bridge Community Association, a local neighbourhood renewal organisation, manages the Centre. The Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) provides statutory funding for three places, and the other places are referred directly from schools in the BELB, the South-Eastern Education and Library Board, and the North-Eastern Education and Library Board.

1.4 The focus of the inspection was on the quality of the provision and the arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection. At the time of the inspection, ten young people attended the Centre.

1.5 Prior to the inspection, the parents/carers received a confidential questionnaire seeking their views on the provision. Of the 12 questionnaires issued to parents, three were returned to the Department of Education (DE). The responses were positive in terms of support for the Centre, as indeed were the comments from the young people who spoke well of the educational experiences on offer.

## **2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

2.1 Overall, the Centre provides a poor education for the young people. The inspection has identified many areas for improvement that will need urgent attention. There is little evidence, despite an improved attendance compared with their previous school, that the young people make any significant progress in their education and learning whilst attending the Centre.

2.2 The inspection findings indicate the following achievements and standards:

- the good intentions of the Management Committee of the Bridge Community Association to provide a relevant education for a group of marginalised young people;
- the commitment, dedication and care of the tutors towards the young people;
- the strong desire of the tutors to acquire additional skills that will enhance the quality of service to the young people; and

- the generally good working relationships between the young people and tutors, and the positive responses of the young people towards the programme on offer.

### **3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

3.1 Despite the deep interest and commitment of the tutors towards educating the young people, the quality of provision for learning is poor. The building used to deliver the education is in a poor state of repair; it is not adequately heated nor does it provide any proper facilities for storage or displays of the young people's work.

3.2 Due to the lack of resources, the Centre is unable to deliver a wide-ranging curriculum. Whilst the tutors encourage the young people's aspirations and abilities, there is no evidence that should some of the young people show an interest in, or display an aptitude to a particular subject, that they could have ready access to furthering that interest, for example, through attendance at another school or institution.

3.3 At the time of the inspection the Bridge Community Association were reviewing their policy for pastoral care and child protection procedures at the Centre. There is an absence of effective policies and procedures with regard to suspensions and expulsions, attendance, behaviour and drug misuse. One young person attending the centre had a statement of special educational needs but the tutors were unaware of the special arrangements in place to help that young person. In addition, there are no effective procedures for communication with parents/carers, former schools and the Education and Library Boards.

### **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

4.1 The quality of leadership and management of the Centre is poor. There is no evidence of any effective quality assurance measures in place by any of the stakeholders or managing organisations, including the former schools, the Management Committee and the Education and Library Boards. This includes monitoring and evaluation of the programme, and support and supervision of the tutors.

4.2 Record-keeping is poor. The information on learners is very limited and not kept in individual files, or in an appropriately safe location. There were no progress reports, permission slips or adequate contact details.

### **5. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 There is little evidence that this Centre is making any significant improvement in the education of the learners that presently attend.

5.2 There are weaknesses in many aspects of the provision at this Centre.

### **6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

6.1 In order to improve the standards the Centre should:

- develop a wider curricula that will meet the aspirations and needs of the learners, and provide them with opportunities to gain accreditation of their learning;

- ensure that the learners' pathways build upon previous levels of attainment and enable progression;
- develop more effective teaching, learning and assessment arrangements;
- create better transition arrangements for the learners;
- ensure that effective child protection/pastoral care policies and procedures, in line with the relevant DE Circulars, are in place;
- ensure that all the bodies with leadership and management responsibilities for the Centre create more effective procedures and policies with regard to admissions, monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance, as well as tutor support and supervision; and
- carry out an immediate health and safety risk assessment of the Roslyn Street premises.

6.2 There is an urgent need for all the statutory bodies concerned, the schools involved and the Bridge Community Association to clarify the arrangements and procedures for admittance and management of placements at the Centre, in the interests of the young people and their effective education.

## 7. CONCLUSION

7.1 In the areas inspected, the inspection has identified major shortcomings in the Centre's work. The areas for improvement need to be addressed urgently in the interests of the learners.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor regularly and report on the Centre's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

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