

An evaluation of the education support
programme provided by Monkstown Boxing Club

March 2024



Providing Inspection services for:
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and other commissioning Departments



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Introduction

Monkstown Boxing Club (the Club) was established in 1983 and has occupied the club premises at Cashel Drive, Newtownabbey since 1996.

The Club supports the wider community to address a range of challenges, including addiction, anti-social behaviour, educational underachievement, poverty, and paramilitarism. The Club offers boxing classes, along with a range of programmes aimed at promoting active citizenship, employment, training and volunteering.

For a decade, from 2012 to 2022, the Club's wide-ranging provision had been underpinned by main grant funding from the National Lottery. It is now dependent on cyclical funding which provides challenges, namely planning for sustainability, while maintaining the current range and reach of its provision and the retention of key, skilled staff who know well the community in which they work.

The evaluation

The Department of Education (DE) commissioned the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) to undertake an evaluation of the educational provision at the Club, as a precondition of its grant award to the Club for the 2023/24 financial year* for its *In Your Corner programme*.

Throughout the report, where text is accompanied by an asterisk, this indicates that additional information can be found in Appendix 1: Notes.

The key success indicators/outcomes for this grant award were set out by the Club in its outline bid for funding and relate not only to the education support programme provided by the Club in collaboration with the local post-primary school, Abbey Community College (the College), but also to the Club's work within the wider community, through young men's and young women's programmes that include personal and social development, leadership development and good relations projects. The key success indicators/outcomes for the grant award are:

1. To continue supporting pupils at risk of disengaging from education through the ASPIRE Education Programme, with targeted year 11 mentoring and delivery of the existing year 12 wrap-around programme.
2. To provide a Breakfast Club so children are ready to learn.
3. To deliver After Schools programmes to help children do well at school.
4. To provide tuition, literacy and numeracy support to build confidence and increase attainment.
5. To promote 'back to school' confidence by delivering Learning Camps.
6. To continue to support young people through Youth Groups.
7. To continue to support families through Family Support activity.

In March 2024, the ETI undertook an evaluation of the education support programme provided by the Club in collaboration with the College. This education support programme will be referred to hereafter as the jointly delivered programme.

Methodology

The evaluation focused mainly on the jointly delivered programme.

During the evaluation visit, inspectors held discussions with young people from both the current and past cohorts of the programme and with their parents. Inspectors also held discussions with key staff, including the leadership team of the Club, representatives of the College's senior leadership team, teachers, youth workers and the classroom assistant.

Inspectors observed a few lessons, although the scope of the evaluation visit was impacted adversely by the ongoing industrial action by the teaching unions. There were also discussions with the Education Authority (EA) and representatives of Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) provision for key stage (KS) 3 and KS 4.

Key Findings

A well-established collaboration

The jointly delivered programme is the result of a well-established collaboration between the Club and the College. It began as a pilot project initiated by the Club and developed and delivered in partnership with the College in the 2016/17 academic year. The associated key success indicator/outcome for the 2023/24 grant award to the Club refers to this jointly delivered programme as the ASPIRE Education Programme:

'To continue supporting pupils at risk of disengaging from education through the ASPIRE Education Programme, with targeted Year 11 mentoring and delivery of the existing Year 12 wrap-around programme.'

The mission statement for the jointly delivered programme is to provide '*opportunities and support for young people to succeed and potentially change their lives*'. The aim of the programme is to engage young people in an educational pathway to study and attain as many qualifications and life skills as possible. A service level agreement (SLA) between the Club and the College underpins the arrangements for the programme, which involves targeted mentoring for year 11 pupils and delivery of the year 12 programme of study. The SLA includes arrangements for safeguarding, reporting and the use of resources, as the pupils who attend the Club remain the responsibility of the College and the Club's provision for the pupils is also the responsibility of the College. The accommodation in the Club provides a positive learning environment. The Club staff have availed of relevant and appropriate professional learning and development, including youth work methodologies, trauma-informed practices and therapeutic crisis intervention training. They also take part in staff development days in the College.

Representatives of the College leadership team reported the collective benefit for the individual pupils, their families and the community of its work with the Club since the inception of the programme as a pilot project in 2016/17. They spoke about its importance in the context of challenges experienced by the school in accessing sufficient early intervention and/or preventative support and services for pupils at risk of disengaging from education. The school reported the challenges included sufficient access to the EA's Education Welfare Service (EWS)*. Additionally, the College indicated challenges over the same time period in optimising its own youth provision.

Continued participation in education

A small group of year 12 pupils at risk of disengaging from education are identified annually by the College as potential participants of the jointly delivered programme. The pupils are identified through the College's review of a range of qualitative and quantitative information which includes: academic progress; attendance, behavioural, pastoral and special educational needs (SEN) information; free school meal entitlement; parental or pupil self-referrals to the programme; community referrals to the programme; and any engagements with external agencies such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)*, the EA's Autism Advisory and Intervention Service (AAIS)* and the EA's EWS.

In discussions with inspectors, the parents of the current and past cohorts of participating year 12 pupils spoke about how the Club and the College engaged well with them and their young people about the jointly delivered programme. This included meetings with the pupils and their parents at the Club, an initial induction session for the pupils with the youth tutors in June, prior to starting the course in September, and a home visit during the summer prior to the pupils' entry to the programme, along with further induction sessions for the pupils at the commencement of the programme. They reported that, as a result, they made well-informed decisions about participation in the programme, subject choices and career progression pathways. The young people know that as participants on the programme, they remain enrolled as pupils of the College and the College reports on their progress to parents. Additionally, a small number of year 11 pupils identified as being at risk of disengaging from education are mentored by the Club's staff.

Delivering the programme

The planning for delivery of the jointly delivered programme takes account of the pupils' previous learning experiences and individual needs, including the barriers and complex challenges they have experienced. Baselining data provides the Club and the College staff delivering the programme with insights about how the identified pupils feel about themselves, as learners and as individuals in relation to the school climate and culture.

The current cohort of year 12 pupils follow a tailored curriculum delivered by youth tutors from the Club, supported by a classroom assistant and in part by teachers at the College. There are individualised timetabled arrangements for each pupil across four areas: academic, vocational, social/personal and physical. It is also the

College's responsibility to ensure that it meets its statutory obligations in respect of these pupils' access to physical education and religious education. The allocation of time spent by pupils at the Club and the College depends on the individualised timetables; typically, two-thirds of the time is spent in the Club and one-third in the College.

There are opportunities for pupils to complete: GCSE/essential skills qualifications in English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy; an open college network (OCN) information and communication technology (ICT) qualification; a GCSE/OCN science qualification; a level 2 certificate in Personal Social Development (ASDAN); occupational studies; and a level 2 Prince's Trust certificate. The ICT, occupational studies and science qualifications are taught within the College. Given that the pupils are undertaking both the ASDAN and the Prince's Trust qualifications, careful consideration needs to be given to the breadth and balance of the curricular offer, to ensure there is not a "sameness" of learning experiences and that the pupils are accessing as broad a range of qualifications for progression as possible which meets the pupil's ability, interests and career aspirations.

The inspection team was unable to evaluate fully the curricular experiences of these year 12 pupils due to the industrial action. In the small number of lessons observed at the Club, the pupils engaged well with their learning and made progress from individual starting points. There was a very high pupil to staff ratio, with individualised support ranging from 1:2 to a 1:3 staff/pupil ratio, along with the teacher or youth leader.

The year 12 pupils are provided with careers education, information, advice and guidance and have opportunities to experience the world of work; those who met with the inspectors spoke about how they had created a curriculum vitae with the Club staff. They appreciate the level of individualised support to help them complete applications and prepare for interview for their transition to further education, training or employment.

A high priority is given to the wellbeing and holistic development of the pupils. There is dedicated time allocated for physical exercise each week, with almost all of the pupils engaging. They participate in boxing activities and walks in Three Mile Water Conservation Park, and a number of the pupils are part of the College football team. The pupils also make use of the Club's specialist fitness equipment and avail of the expertise of the Club staff who are all trained fitness instructors. The staff who met with the inspectors are clearly focused on providing the pupils with strategies to address their individual barriers and challenges, as well as supporting them to progress in their learning. A culture of keeping safe is evident within the Club and the pupils feel well cared for by the Club staff and also appreciate the support of key link staff from the College. They know who to go to and how to access support when needed. The expertise of the Club staff is used to support well the pupils, with the input of a number of external agencies when appropriate.

The year 11 and year 12 pupils who spoke to the inspectors' value highly being able to use the social, behavioural and emotional well-being strategies taught by the Club's staff, including for anger management, managing stress, self-discipline and motivation; as a result, they feel more ready to learn. Healthy lifestyles are

encouraged and promoted through the delivery of sessions and workshops on relevant themes and topics. In discussion with pupils, they identified the need for the College to review the effectiveness of its learning for life and work provision to meet better their needs. Pupils mentored by the Club's staff spoke to inspectors about how the support they receive has enabled them to manage stress and anxiety, deal with conflict and challenging relationships and make more informed, responsible decisions. The current cohort of year 11 pupils value the regular contact with their mentor and as a result, they feel they are more ready to learn and cope with the various challenges they face.

The distance travelled

There are processes in place for the regular monitoring, evaluation and review of the jointly delivered programme. These processes focus appropriately on a range of measures to monitor the progress of the participating year 11 and year 12 pupils, from their various starting points. As a consequence of participation in the programme, it is demonstrated clearly that there is continued engagement with education for the pupils, with: high levels of attendance and punctuality; increased academic achievement, including the attainment of qualifications; a reduction in suspensions and expulsions; improved confidence, self-esteem and communication skills; and progression to further education, training and employment. There is also a reported reduction in behavioural and pastoral concerns.

The year 11 and year 12 pupils who met with the inspectors were able to reflect with maturity on their own particular circumstances and experiences; they explained how their confidence, self-esteem and readiness to learn has grown as a result of participating on the programme. They were planning for the next steps in their learning, whether to further education, training or employment. These pupils spoke very respectfully about the Club staff and how these staff are their role models; they valued greatly their support and how they have helped them to learn "how not to get into bother". They appreciate how these staff treat them with respect and praise them for what they are doing well.

The pupils with special educational needs and their parents who met with inspectors spoke about the challenges they faced in getting the individualised support they needed, prior to participation on the jointly delivered programme. These parents recognise the challenges facing education, health and social services and value the increased staff to pupil ratio through the programme. They appreciate how the College has developed its learning support centre and adjusted accommodation to meet the needs of young people with physical barriers to learning. One young person who transferred to the College from a special school and participated in the jointly delivered programme, now attends university and volunteers with the Club as their inclusion champion.

Parents of the current and past cohorts of participating year 12 pupils who met with the inspectors openly discussed their children's educational journeys. They spoke about the barriers and significant challenges they had experienced; a few expressed the view that their children's educational experiences had been inconsistent prior to their participation on the programme. They valued the expectations that the Club staff set for their children and were wholly positive about how the programme

impacted on their children's readiness for learning due to improved self-confidence and self-esteem. As a result, they indicated that their children had matured, developed life skills and were achieving success. They appreciated the regularity and the positivity of the communications between the Club staff and themselves.

Additional provision

The evaluation focused mainly on the jointly delivered programme. Several of the key success indicators/outcomes for the grant award however refer to well-established collaborations between the Club and the wider community*, with a reach which involves pupils from a range of schools, their parents/carers and other family members, and stakeholders across the community.

Breakfast clubs are provided in both the Club and the College in line with the success indicator that children are ready to learn. Inspectors observed two breakfast club sessions at the Club at which a total of 23 pupils from years 10 to 13 were in attendance over the two days. They responded well to the positive, motivating staff interactions and engaged well in the welcoming, inclusive environment. The pupils spoke positively of how the breakfast club offered them a place to start the day with a breakfast and to meet with their friends in preparation for the school day. They reflected maturely on how their involvement with the Club has supported them in their personal, social and emotional development and in addressing barriers to learning. The older pupils spoke confidently about their learning and their career aspirations, taking turns, showing initiative, listening and responding to others.

Inspectors also spoke to pupils who were involved in youth leadership programmes with the Club. They spoke with confidence about feeling safe in making friends and visiting parts of Belfast they previously considered as dangerous for them. Their critical thinking and personal capabilities were evident as they reflected on the benefits of the 'Building Walls Breaking Walls Programme' for them. A number of them had benefited from learning with young people from other areas of global conflict. They highlighted the need for more shared education opportunities through school. They are self-confident in expressing their views as a result of participation in the Club's leadership programmes, and in recognising their unique strengths and goals. They feel they have gained a strong sense of social responsibility in wanting to help others, to pay forward the help they have received. Furthermore, they value their active democracy participation through dialogue with local councillors and political representatives at Stormont and Westminster.

There was also an opportunity for inspectors to observe an after-school mathematics support/homework club session delivered at the Club and attended by a number of the College's year 10 pupils and year 11 pupils. Inspectors also joined a session involving a small group of young people from five schools/organisations who have been participating in youth group activities with the Club. These activities have provided the young people with opportunities to engage with other young people from differing backgrounds and perspectives through sport, workshops and educational visits.

The EOTAS staff who spoke with inspectors value the personal and professional learning they have gained through collaboration with the Club on how physical activity and the self-discipline of boxing can be used as strategies to support their pupils' wellbeing. They value the work of the Club in support of the wider community. They report engagement with increasing numbers of young people expressing feelings of loneliness, and they signpost them to the Club's evening and weekend extracurricular activities.

Inspectors also spoke with a small number of women who participate in the Club's Family Support health and wellbeing and support sessions. The women who spoke with inspectors were very positive about their experiences with the Club and report the benefits to them of engagement in the Club's sports, personal and social programmes. They value the ongoing support from the Club staff for themselves as individuals in overcoming personal challenges, the promotion of their health and wellbeing, the reduction in social isolation, and the range of support for their young people.

Conclusion

The jointly delivered programme is unique in that it has been designed for a particular school and community context. The programme is successful in supporting the continued participation of the identified year 11 and year 12 pupils in education. All of the pupils make good progress as measured from their various starting points and the pupils have remained in education despite the identified risk of their disengagement. They achieve educational outcomes and progress to further education, training or employment. Additionally, their health and wellbeing has improved.

Staff in both the Club and the College are committed to meeting the needs of these pupils, and they focus: on the provision of embedded opportunities for education and training; raising aspiration through attaining qualifications; and, supporting positive progression to further education, training and employment. The Club monitors closely the progress of participants and remains in contact with them after they leave the programme. The young people representing the current and recent past cohorts of pupils and their parents who inspectors met with were wholly positive about the programme.

The Club completes the quarterly monitoring requirements associated with DE's grant award of funding. These quarterly returns should be informed better by joint monitoring, evaluation and review by the Club and the College, to not only demonstrate more fully the impact of the programme but also the rationale for its continuing as a jointly delivered programme.

Consideration should be given to how lessons learned from the jointly delivered programme can be integrated into the statutory provision for all pupils in the College, including for example:

- the allocation of combined resources, both financial and staff, to best meet the needs of the pupils in the programme;

- the curricular experiences in school of the pupils prior to participation in the programme;
- the curriculum offer in both the Club and the College for pupils who participate in the programme; and
- the student support provided within the College, including for example the deployment of the Club staff, the College's social worker and the youth provision.

Appendix 1: Notes

Page 2 **a grant award to the Club for the 2023/24 financial year***

The grant award of £110,000 by the DE from *A Fair Start* funding.

An application to the DE from the Club was made in 2022, seeking funding of its operations from September 2023. Subsequently, DE made a letter of offer in April 2023 to fund the club operations under DE's Tackling Educational Disadvantage initiative.

The Club confirmed to the DE that the following funding is in place for the project:

1. DE WRAP/Tackling Paramilitarism Programme (for the ASPIRE education programme element) - £40k
2. Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and Children In Need - £36.4k
3. NHSCT - £10k

Page 4 **the EA's Education Welfare Service (EWS)***

The EWS supports parents and carers to fulfil their statutory responsibility in ensuring that children attend school regularly. The EWS works in partnership with schools, parents, EA Services and other professionals to reduce pupil absence and to raise achievement, enabling young people to maximise their educational opportunities and potential.

the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)*

CAMHS promotes emotional wellbeing and delivers mental health services to children and young people up to the age of 18.

the EA's Autism Advisory and Intervention Service (AAIS)*

The AAIS is a regional service that provides advice and support for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Referrals to AAIS are made by a school's educational psychologist.

Page 7 **well-established collaborations between the Club and the wider community***

The Club is a THRIVE partner. THRIVE brings together local parents, early years partners, schools, youth partners, churches, community groups, and statutory and voluntary organisations in Rathcoole and Monkstown: '*Working together so children and young people can thrive.*' Beyond Monkstown and Rathcoole, the Club's catchment area


is Ballyclare, Glengormley, and North Belfast. As well as the College, the young people involved attend a range of schools including Ballyclare Secondary School, Ballyclare High School, Belfast High, Belfast Royal Academy, Blessed Trinity, Carrick Academy, Glengormley Integrated and Hazelwood Integrated. Support is provided to young refugees currently attending the College, Glengormley Integrated and Hazelwood Integrated.

The Club is also involved with a number of Good Relations projects delivered in partnership with Ardoyne Youth Enterprises, Lagmore Youth Project, New Lodge Youth Club and Holy Trinity Boxing Club.

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