



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Downpatrick AEP,
County Down

Report of an inspection (Involving
Action Short of Strike) in
November 2018



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

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1. Context

The Downpatrick AEP (Alternative Education Programme) provides education for up to 15 key stage 4 (KS4) pupils and forms part of the Education Authority (EA) Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) provision. The centre is situated within the Ardmore House school buildings and since the time of the previous inspection, issues with the accommodation and the external facilities remain unresolved. The EA's Education Welfare Service are still located within the centre and continue to occupy an office and interview rooms.

The senior youth worker co-ordinates the work of the centre supported by one full-time permanent teacher for mathematics, one full-time temporary teacher for English, a part-time teacher for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and two full-time learning support assistants. A senior youth worker provides counselling support and guidance on a part time basis each week.

Four of the teaching unions which make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) have declared industrial action primarily in relation to a pay dispute. This includes non-co-operation with the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Prior to the inspection, the organisation informed the ETI that almost all of the teachers would not be co-operating with the inspectors. The ETI have a statutory duty to monitor, inspect and report on the quality of education under Article 102 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986. Therefore, the inspection proceeded and the following evaluations are based on the evidence as made available at the time of the inspection.

2. Views of parents and staff

Most of the staff responded to the questionnaires and the responses were mainly positive. A small number of issues were discussed with the centre co-ordinator and those responsible for governance. The questionnaire returned from the referring schools indicated strong satisfaction with the work of the centre. However, the lack of involvement of most of the referring schools in never visiting the centre to monitor the pastoral and academic progress made by their pupils were discussed with those responsible for governance and with the centre co-ordinator. There were no responses to the parental questionnaire.

3. Focus of inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the outcomes for pupils; in particular, how the organisation is addressing individual needs;
- the quality of provision in the organisation; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Unable to assure the quality of education
Outcomes for learners	No performance available
Quality of provision	No performance available
Leadership and management	No performance available

5. Outcomes for learners

- The inspectors met with a small group of pupils who were articulate, friendly and confident in their discussions.
- Over the past three years almost all of the pupils achieve a qualification in literacy and numeracy but there is a lack of progression for most of the pupils as they move from year 11 into year 12. The pupils achieve consistently well in the Prince's Trust qualification, with almost all achieving level 2. None of pupils have achieved 5 GCSE grades A*-C or equivalent qualifications over the past 3 years.
- Last year none of the cohort achieved better than two GCSE grades A*-C or equivalent.
- The centre does not monitor if pupils transitioned to, and maintained placements in, further education, training or school upon leaving the centre.
- In the past three years there has been a decreasing attendance trend. Of the most recent cohort of pupils, half have attendance less than 60% and one quarter of the pupils have an attendance less than 40%. During the inspection only 25% of the pupils were in attendance. Attendance is an area that requires significant improvement.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the overall outcomes for the pupils;
- progression in the pupil's learning; and
- the pupil's wider skills and dispositions.

6. Quality of provision

- The curriculum is insufficiently challenging and too narrow to meet the needs of the pupils who would benefit from the opportunity to return to their school part-time to study additional subjects, including GCSE courses. The pupils do not have the opportunity to attend vocational classes in the local college of further education or with a local training provider. The provision of ICT on one day per week is insufficient and does not motivate or enable effective progression. The centre does not provide the minimum curriculum as stated in the DE EOTAS Circular 2014/24.
- The centre closes early each Wednesday to enable the teachers to attend meetings. These arrangements inappropriately disrupt the pupils' education programme and therefore the centre is not meeting the minimum requirement for the hours of attendance as stated in the DE EOTAS Circular 2014/24.
- The centre has identified the need to review the reward system to take into account the views of the pupils and to link it with a mentoring system. It is important that the pupils are provided with the opportunity to reflect on their behaviour throughout the day through the use of an effective monitoring system so that the development of self-regulation skills can be monitored by staff and shared with pupils.

- A number of assessments and diagnostic tests have been completed with pupils this year. It is important that this information is used to baseline, monitor and inform the planning for their progression more effectively in order to select the appropriate numeracy and literacy qualification for each pupil.
- The centre has begun to use an assessment system to baseline the social and emotional needs of the pupils and it is important that this information is used to inform more individualised interventions. While the pupils' social and emotional wellbeing is developed through preventative programmes, with the support of a number of external agencies, there is insufficient therapeutic support in place. The lack of support from the Education and Psychology Service this year is impacting negatively on therapeutic interventions.
- The centre's accommodation is cramped and insufficient for the maximum number of young people; a small number of health and safety issues are identified for attention, (see Appendix A). The lack of outdoor facilities for the young people inhibits opportunities for the young people to calm, de-escalate and relax or engage in outdoor activities.
- The referring schools do not engage sufficiently with the centre after the initial referral stage, preventing effective joint planning of education programmes for their pupils. In addition most schools fail to monitor and track the academic and pastoral progress of their pupils by visiting them in the centre each term; they have no input to the centre development plan. The lack of opportunities provided by schools to enable pupils to return to their school to study part-time is inhibiting their entitlement to the full curriculum. Nor do the pupils have the opportunity to return to their schools for sporting activities, careers events or school formal occasions in accordance with the DE guidance.
- The centre is keen to be included in their local areal learning community. The inspection endorses this aspiration.

The ETI was unable to evaluate:

- the effectiveness of the guidance and support in bringing about high quality individual learning experiences;
- the effectiveness and impact of planning, teaching, learning and assessment in promoting successful learning ; and
- care and welfare.

7. Leadership and management

- While there are referral agreements between the pupils' schools and the centre, the centre has identified the need to implement service level agreements to ensure that schools work more closely with the centre in monitoring the progress and well-being of their pupils and ensuring they have the same curriculum entitlement as their peers.

- The centre development plan is not informed by a process of rigorous self-evaluation and consultation with staff, parents and referring schools. As such it lacks sufficient detail and strategic clarity to effect improvement. There are no action plans in place to guide the work of the centre staff and management.
- The centre management do not use the C2k information systems effectively to record and analyse data.
- The centre is governed by officers from the EA. Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection the parents and staff can have limited confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governance group need to urgently address the serious deficiencies in the accommodation, which persist, unresolved since the previous inspection, to ensure that the academic and pastoral needs of the young people can be met.
- The governance group and centre management need to provide accountability for, and challenge to, the low level outcomes attained by the young people. The EA should consider how to facilitate greater involvement of local referring schools, community representatives and parents in supporting the work of the centre with representation on a local governance group.

The ETI was unable to evaluate fully:

- the effectiveness and impact of the strategic leadership;
- the effectiveness and impact of the middle leadership;
- the effectiveness of action to promote and sustain improvement, including self-evaluation and the development planning process; and
- the governance.

8. Safeguarding

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding pupils reflect broadly the guidance from the Department of Education. The pupils report that they feel safe in the organisation and that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or welfare. They report positive working relationships with staff who support and help them with their learning. However, owing to the action short of strike, the ETI was unable to evaluate fully the outworking of the arrangements for safeguarding in the school. The centre needs to:

- review and improve the risk assessments for educational trips and individual young people to ensure they are more comprehensive and effective; and
- revise policies to include the attendance and complaints policy.

9. Overall effectiveness

Owing to the impact of the action short of strike being taken by the centre staff, the ETI is unable to assure parents/carers, the wider community and stakeholders of the quality of education being provided for the pupils. The organisation is a high priority for future inspection with no further notice.

Health and safety/accommodation

Due to the location of the electronic access controls and the lack of close circuit camera systems staff cannot identify visually who is at the main entrance to the building before unlocking the door. Therefore there is a risk that unauthorised persons may be able to gain access to the building.

The accommodation is too small for the number of pupils registered.

The lack of suitable withdrawal rooms and facilities for the young people with challenging behaviours need to be addressed urgently.

The centre is situated on a very restricted site with insufficient outdoor leisure space or grounds to enable the young people with behavioural issues to calm and relax.

The toilet facilities are shared by staff and pupils. This arrangement is inappropriate and unsuitable.

The centre car park is inadequate for the number of users on site.

Statistical data

TOPS EOTAS	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Enrolment	13	16	13	13
% Attendance	62	59	45	N/A
% FSME ¹	63	50	78	46
Newcomers	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: data as held by the organisation.

* fewer than 5

N/A not available

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

Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website at [Inspection and Self-evaluation Framework: EOTAS](#)

Inspectors held formal and informal discussions with senior managers for the centre and held informal discussions with pupils (in a group).

The arrangements for this inspection included a meeting with representatives from the governance group and the opportunity for all parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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 ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the organisation:

The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The organisation needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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