

Sunflowers (formerly Lea Green) Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Centre, County Antrim

Report of a Follow-up Inspection in February 2023



Providing Inspection services for:
Department of Education
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Third Follow-up Inspection to Sunflowers (formerly Lea Green) Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Centre, County Antrim

Introduction

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) conducted an inspection of Lea Green EOTAS centre in [November 2016](#), and two follow-up inspections in [May 2018](#) and [February 2020](#), the latter of which was impacted by industrial action short of strike (owing to the industrial action short of strike by teachers, the ETI was unable to evaluate the extent to which the important areas for improvement in the first follow-up inspection were addressed). Lea Green EOTAS amalgamated with the Rathmore primary team and has been renamed Sunflowers EOTAS centre. Currently, it is only providing outreach support in schools.

The areas for improvement identified in the follow-up inspection in May 2018 were:

- to evaluate the effectiveness of the planning and interventions and their impact on the outcomes for the children, particularly in literacy and numeracy; and
- to develop a consistent approach to sharing support strategies with the children.

Key actions and changes

Key actions or changes which affect the work of the centre since the initial inspection include the:

- amendment of the centre's action plans to include appropriately identified priorities for improvement;
- closure of the Lea Green centre in May 2019, and the formation of Sunflowers EOTAS within the Education Authority (EA) Primary Behaviour Support and Provisions (PBS&P);
- increase in staffing complement to 15 Behaviour Support Assistants (BSAs);
- review of the provision to focus on meeting children's needs through intervention within the child's mainstream school rather than in an EOTAS centre;
- provision of tiered support for schools, including a Telephone Advice and Support Helpline (TASH), school staff capacity-building training, and support for individual children, groups, and whole-class behaviour support;

- a programme of professional learning for centre staff in safeguarding and therapeutic interventions, literacy, nurture training, restorative, and trauma-informed practice; and
- development of the referral system and service level agreements to include time-bound support for children and school staff.

Views of staff and referring schools

Almost all the centre staff responded to the questionnaire. Their positive feedback emphasised how they value the impact of their support on the children's outcomes. They highlighted their strong sense of empathy and understanding as they work to support the staff and children in the referring schools. They appreciate their very supportive team when having to address challenging behaviour and implement new approaches in schools. In discussion with the inspectors, the centre staff value opportunities to share their learning and experiences through the weekly team meetings.

The small number of responses from referring schools stated their appreciation for the level of advice, support and professional learning provided by centre staff, and their expertise in helping their school meet the complex Social Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing (SBEW) needs of the children.

Key findings

- All of the children supported by the centre staff remain within their mainstream schools, resulting in no referrals to the EOTAS centre in the past three years. Of the 280 children supported between 2021-2023, only two required further support. In addition, the centre staff have facilitated teacher professional learning for 116 schools in order to increase the level of early intervention support.
- In the lessons observed, the children engaged well in their learning, showed self-confidence in responding to consistent, respectful greetings and in social interaction with adults and each other. The children are happy and safe in an inclusive, and nurturing learning environment. They benefit from well-planned sessions with high quality resources resulting in their ability to take turns, listen to instructions, give considered responses and use the strategies they have learned to regulate their emotions and behaviour. The children displayed positive attitudes and dispositions to their learning, including being inquisitive, excited and reflective. The staff modelled effective intonation and communication through questioning, storytelling and puppetry to develop the children's communication skills.

- The planning reflects each child's individual learning needs and is well informed by data from SBEW assessments, and information from school, parents/carers and multi-agencies. The staff identify with the children their strengths, interests and goals to plan an individualised learning programme, with opportunities to link to topics in their schools. The centre demonstrates the positive impact of intervention strategies through robust monitoring of the children's progress and improving outcomes from their baseline positions. The views of the children are captured well in the evaluations of each child's progress by the staff. These are shared with school staff along with the strategies that work best for each child.
- The centre's strategic vision (to inspire, support and challenge school communities to create child-centred, flexible and responsive approaches to meet the needs of all pupils) is reflected well in the development of a research and practice-informed therapeutic support programme to staff in schools. The centre staff engage in PBS&P working groups to develop regional professional learning for schools across a range of areas from policy advice to intervention strategies for learning and teaching. For example: developing the calm plan; training in the development and implementation of a SBEW plan incorporating the child's voice; meeting SBEW needs through the Whole School Together positive behaviour policy, review and audit; early years transition; the PBS&P 'On Track' literacy programme; Connect and Nurture approaches and programmes in reducing anxiety and developing resilience with the Regional Integrated Support for Education (RISE) NI.
- The centre's strategic leadership is developing well a community of learning for their staff and BSAs. There is effective and shared planning with agreed learning outcomes, appropriate resources and the consistent use of strategies for self-regulation shared with the children. Through robust monitoring and evaluation by the centre leader and EA management, priorities for improvement are identified and acted upon promptly, including proactive liaison with other EA services to support the children and their schools. The centre captures creatively ways to celebrate success through the harnessing of the views of children, the referring schools, parents/carers and staff.
- Currently, the EA management provides the governance scrutiny and challenge function and needs to provide assurance for the arrangements for the independent scrutiny of safeguarding.

Overall effectiveness

Sunflowers EOTAS Centre now demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all the children. The ETI will monitor how the centre sustains improvement.

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