



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -  
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*Providing Inspection Services for*  
**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**

#### **The Pathways Project Belfast**

**Inspected: March 2009**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Pathways Project was established in 1998 and was supported until 2004 by European funding; it continues to be managed by the charity Extern which now receives funding from the Department of Education (DE) through the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB).

1.2 The Project provides alternative full-time education and training programmes for young people mainly in year 12 and a few from year 11, all of whom come from north and west Belfast post-primary schools including, Belfast Model School for Girls, Belfast Model School for Boys, St Patrick's College, Little Flower Girls' School, Hazelwood Integrated College and Edmund Rice College. The Project is underpinned by a 'young person centred approach', where the strengths of the young people are identified and built upon.

1.3 The senior staff within each sponsoring school identify those young people whom they believe to be at risk of disengaging from formal education or who are unlikely to gain few if any formal qualifications before leaving school. After consultation with their parents, the young people are selected for participation in the Project as an alternative to the normal year 12 in-school provision; in addition, the young people themselves must be willing and committed to attending the Project. The Project operates from Monday to Thursday each week; a few of the young people have work experience each Friday.

1.4 At present, the young people attend one of three community education centres, situated on the Antrim Road, at the Hammer Centre off the Shankill Road and in the city centre. Each centre has a project worker, an essential skills tutor and a part-time youth worker and liaises with a link teacher from each of the participating schools. At the time of the inspection, there was a total of 33 young people attending one of the three centres; most of the young people who attend live relatively close to the Project centres; two young people were being educated at home. There is an equal split between boys and girls attending the Project education centres.

1.5 The focus of the inspection was on the quality of the provision and the arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection.

1.6 Prior to the inspection a questionnaire was issued to the parents/carers of young people who are attending the three centres. These were confidential questionnaires seeking their views on the effectiveness of the provision. Of the 36 questionnaires issued to parents, four were returned to DE and two contained written comments. The responses were highly complimentary of the centres and of the support provided for the young people. During the inspection, the young people spoke positively about their involvement in the Project and of the staff for whom they expressed high regard. Feedback from all of the schools was highly positive and very complimentary about the work of the Project and many viewed the provision as essential in assisting them to support the young people.

## **2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

2.1 The Pathways provision is satisfactory. The inspection found strengths in many aspects of the provision with some areas for improvement which need to be addressed. The majority of the young people improve their attendance rates, make good progress in managing their difficulties while in the Project and some two-thirds achieve further education or training placements.

2.2 The inspection findings indicate the following achievements and standards:

- the good motivation of the young people in engaging with the staff and the effective working relationships in each centre;
- the positive attitudes of the majority of the young people towards gaining qualifications; the young people, who attend regularly, show enthusiasm for the programmes provided and make good progress;
- the good behaviour of the young people and the high standards expected of them by the staff;
- the high number of young people who achieve accreditation in the Project (Appendix 1);
- the discernable progress the young people make to achieve vocational training or employment; and
- the significant improvements in the attendance of the young people.

2.3 In the month before the inspection, the average attendance of the young people on the entire project was 81% and eleven of the young people had 100% attendance. The young people in the city centre group had an average attendance of 81% for the term prior to the inspection whilst the average attendance of the Shankill group was 90% and the average attendance of the Antrim Road group was 91%. This is a notable achievement overall.

2.4 In addition, of the 29 young people who left the Project in June 2008, 19 went on to further training, eight went into full-time employment and two became full-time carers. These outcomes reflect the positive educational and pastoral experiences which the young people embrace while in the centres.

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

3.1 The quality of instruction and support is good in each of the centres. The work is well focused on the individual needs of the young people.

3.2 The main strengths of the quality of provision for learning are:

- the excellent working relationships at all levels;
- the mutual respect between the staff and the young people;

- the good quality of the instruction and the high level of preparation by the staff, including an experienced volunteer teacher who makes an excellent contribution on behalf of the young people;
- the good collaborative work in which the young people engage;
- the relaxed atmosphere and supportive ethos in each centre;
- the sensitive approaches of the staff and their deep understanding and respect for the young people with whom they work;
- the well-organised and effective daily routines;
- the effective records which are maintained on attendance and engagement; and
- the clear understanding of the staff of the individual needs and interests of the young people.

3.3 The current curriculum choice is narrow and could be extended by linking further with the mainstream schools to ensure a greater breadth and access to the wider curriculum choice. Furthermore, to improve the quality of the provision, there is a need to develop thematic teaching units that are based on the interests and needs of the pupils that will develop their numeracy and literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills; further, to develop an ICT strategy which ensures high quality access for the staff and the young people in all of the centres.

3.4 There are strengths in the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The Project has policies and procedures in place, which ensure that all staff are appropriately vetted and trained in child protection matters and promote the young people's self-esteem and self-confidence. It is important, however, that the pastoral procedures are kept under review to take account of the relevant DE Circulars.

3.5 An important strength of the provision is the employment of a mentor to support those who have been unable to gain access to employment or further training and to track their progress for up to two years on leaving the Project.

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

4.1 The quality of leadership and management of the Project is effective in managing the day-to-day organisation of the programmes; each centre is well managed by project workers. At the time of the inspection there was an Acting Project Manager who works hard in supporting the staff and the young people; she undertook this role in a voluntary capacity in addition to her other duties, all of which she carries out in a professional manner.

4.2 There is a need for the management structure to be reviewed and a more strategic approach taken to ensure the long-term viability and development of this project; in addition, the Project's funding is an issue which inhibits future planning. Prior to the inspection, the Project Manager had outlined a vision of the way forward for the Project advocating that the

experiences and expertise of the Pathways Project should be incorporated into an overarching BELB strategy for alternative education provision (AEP). The inspection team supports this proposal as an appropriate way forward.

4.3 It is important to disseminate those successful learning, teaching and pastoral strategies developed and implemented within the Project to mainstream education, especially to the contributory schools, and other providers of AEP.

4.4 Strong team-work is a significant strength in the management of the Project. There is good staff morale and strong and effective working relationships. A key strength of the Project is the flexible response of the staff to meeting the needs of the young people and the demands of the schools that they serve.

4.5 A significant feature of the Project is the benefit it obtains from the input of experienced youth workers who have an intimate knowledge of the needs of the young people and of the communities from which they come.

4.6 There are effective links between the participating schools and the Pathways Project's staff. Each school has a link teacher who receives monthly reports on their young person's attendance, progress and engagement. These teachers make visits to the relevant centres to monitor progress. Some schools provide curriculum assistance to the Pathways Project's staff and a few of the young people have regular contact with their school for examination support; this good practice should be extended. A few of the young people will re-engage with their school at post-16 level to take additional qualifications.

4.7 The main strengths of the leadership and management of the Project are:

- the dedication of the Acting Project Manager to the work of the Pathways Project; she maintains good working relationships with the staff and has a strong commitment to the welfare of the young people whom they strive to support;
- the significantly effective contribution of youth workers in supporting the young people;
- the commitment in each centre to maintaining effective and very regular links with parents/carers and the schools' link teachers;
- the high quality of the communication within the centres, including regular review and briefing meetings;
- the excellent levels of co-operation amongst the whole staff which is clearly promoted by the value which the Acting Project Manager places on their work;
- the efforts of the staff to promote a high level of achievement for themselves and the young people;

- the good quality of the documentation including, detailed policies, attendance data, evaluations of the provision and incident and monthly reports to link teachers and Extern and BELB personnel; and
- the developing culture of self reflection and evaluation which has enabled the Project to identify relevant areas for improvement, which this inspection endorses.

## **5. OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 The overall effectiveness of the Project indicates many strengths in aspects of the provision.

5.2 The main strengths are:

- the excellent working relationships at all levels and the mutual respect between the staff and the young people;
- the nurturing and supportive environment for the young people who attend the Projects;
- the responsive and flexible response to meeting the needs of the pupils; the effective partnerships with the participating schools and the highly positive feedback from these schools;
- the positive outcomes for most of the young people and the progress made by them in terms of their self-confidence, good attendance and ability to cope with their difficulties;
- the dedication of the Acting Project Manager to the work of the each centre; and
- the very good tracking of the young people who have recently left the Project.

## **6. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

6.1 The short-term nature of much of the funding impacts adversely on the work of the Project, especially on the retention of experienced staff, the necessary expansion of the current curricular and vocational programmes, and on the acquisition of more suitable accommodation.

6.2 In order to improve the Project further, there is a need for the management of the Pathways Project to enter into discussion with the BELB to consider the Project's long-term viability, to ensure that staff access appropriate training courses and to address the significant accommodation issues. In short there is a need further to:

- develop a more strategic management structure and plan to ensure the long-term viability and development of the Project;

- consider how to increase the range of curriculum experiences and accreditation routes available; for example, there is a need to develop more substantial working links with the senior management and staff of the contributory schools to obtain greater staff assistance for broadening the curriculum and for additional General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) work; in addition, to provide for the young people, in partnership with others, increased access to vocational education; and
- ensure that the staff benefit from increased access to staff development and other courses organised by the BELB, particularly those targeting issues relevant to AEP and special educational needs.

## **7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

7.1 It is evident that the young people currently attending the Pathways Project are benefiting personally, socially and educationally from their participation in this provision. The strong commitment of the staff to the work of the centres has resulted in good outcomes for the young people. Significantly higher levels of attendance are recorded for almost all the young people. For many of the young people, a good level of engagement with learning leads to successful transition to further education, training or to employment and, for some, successful reintegration into mainstream school.

7.2 Many of the areas for improvement were originally highlighted in the 2004 inspection report and still have not been addressed; these include, the need to broaden the learning programme, particularly through a greater emphasis on vocational education, work-placement, and creative and expressive activities; the need for increased access to staff development and other courses organised by the BELB. While there has been improved access to some interesting creative and expressive activities, these do not constitute a regular coherent programme. It was also noted that much of the accommodation used is of a poor standard, and, in general, is not suitable for the delivery of a broad and balanced programme.

7.3 There is a need for the management of this Project to consider the long-term strategy for the Project and to address the key areas for improvement.

7.4 In most of the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this organisation is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in the curriculum, strategic management and the accommodation which need to be addressed if the needs of all the young people are to be met more effectively. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement.



## APPENDIX 1

Pathways Accreditation June 2008				
Total of 35 Young People.				
Essential Skills Literacy		Essential Skills Numeracy	GCSE Learning for Life and Work	
Level 1	6	12	Grade C	4
Entry level 3	21	28	Grade D	13
Entry level 2	6	4	Grade E	8
Entry level 1	1	1	Grade F	4
			Grade G	3
			Grade U	1

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

- As the accommodation is not good overall, the inspection team recommends that the management of this Project consider the suitability of all the venues currently used for tuition and relocate or improve as necessary. In line with the service level agreement, there is a need for management to review the health and safety arrangements at each site and, particularly at the city centre location.

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