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*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 Alternative Education Provision Inspection

**Open Doors Learning Centre
Belfast**

Inspected: February 2007

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Open Doors Learning Centre (the Centre) is situated in Barrack Street, Belfast. It is an out-of-school, alternative education provision (AEP) for up to ten young people aged 14-16 years, who have been disengaged from mainstream education and at risk of social and educational marginalisation. In most cases, the young people have been out of mainstream school for some months before admission to the Centre.

1.2 The young people attend daily and follow a broad curriculum focusing on English, mathematics, information and communication technology, art, Gaelic, personal and social education, science, history, geography, occupational studies, home economics and Learning for Life and Work at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or Entry level.

1.3 The Centre is under the patronage of the Congregation of Christian Brothers' Trust Northern Ireland (CCBTNI) which funds entirely the provision including salaries, heating, lighting, accommodation and teaching resources, at a basic cost of some £45,000 per year. During the inspection, the Centre co-ordinator raised the question of statutory funding and a willingness to negotiate with the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and the Department of Education (DE) in respect of the funding issue and the future role of the Centre. The inspection team considers this an appropriate action in light of the current DE review of AEP.

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, eight 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 DE and two contained written comments. The responses were complimentary of the Centre and of the support provided for the young people. In addition, the young people spoke highly of the Centre and of the staff for whom they expressed high regard.

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 Overall, the Centre provides a sound education for the young people. 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 make good progress in managing their difficulties while in the Centre and most make satisfactory progress in their academic work gaining accreditation across a range of courses. A small number of the young people continue their education at further and higher education level or enter full-time employment.

2.2 The inspection findings indicate the following achievements and standards:

- the strong commitment of the staff to the young people's pastoral care and education;
- the opportunities for the young people to develop their self-esteem and social skills;

- the appreciation of the parents for the work of the Centre;
- the good motivation of the young people to engage with learning;
- the high quality of the accommodation and attractive decor, resources and the layout of the learning bays which enable small group and individual teaching to take place within a secure and open environment; and
- the opportunities for the young people to gain external accreditation.

3. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 Teaching and learning are consistently good in the Centre and underpinned by careful attention to individual needs and external course requirements and timescales. As a consequence, the young people engage well with the learning and make satisfactory progress. While attendance is an issue for some of the young people, the staff make every effort to ensure that work is completed and of a satisfactory standard. The curriculum is broad but would be enhanced further by providing opportunities for the young people to access physical education, work-experience and links with other agencies such as the local college of further education and training organisations.

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

- the staff's calm approach to lessons, which promotes a relaxed atmosphere, allows teaching to progress at a measured pace and assists the young people's understanding and concentration;
- the young people, who attend regularly, show enthusiasm for learning and accept that they need to work hard to ensure a better future for themselves; and
- the daily routines, including the shared break and lunch times which offer opportunities for counselling support and encouragement.

3.3 In addition, there are strengths in the quality of the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection. The school 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 existing Centre protocols take account of the relevant DE Circulars.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The quality of the leadership and management of the Centre is satisfactory. The Centre co-ordinator manages the Centre efficiently and is supported well by the other members of staff to ensure the smooth operation of the provision. A strength of the Centre is the flexible response to meeting the needs of the young people. A further important asset is the funding provided by the CCBTNI, which ensures that the Centre can operate to a high standard of resource.

4.2 The main strengths of the leadership and management of the Centre are:

- the active efforts of the co-ordinator and the staff to promote a high level of achievement; and
- the detailed policies, support materials and clear lines of communication in place to help promote learning and improve on aspects of the Centre's performance.

5. **OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**

5.1 The overall effectiveness of the Centre indicates many strength in aspects of the provision.

5.2 The main strengths are:

- the progress made by the young people in terms of their self-confidence and ability to cope with their difficulties and the improvements in their academic work;
- the leadership and management of the co-ordinator and the sense of team-work among the staff; and
- the good standard of teaching and learning, and positive outcomes for most of the young people.

6. **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

6.1 In order to improve the standards further, the Centre should:

- establish more formal arrangements for admission and assessment to enable the Centre to monitor and evaluate the impact of their provision;
- develop closer ties with the BELB services;
- develop provision for physical education;
- establish better links with the local college of further education and training organisations; and
- review the policy for child protection and pastoral care to align it more definitively with relevant DE Circulars.

7. **CONCLUSION**

7.1 The Open Doors Learning Centre has many strengths in its educational and pastoral provision with a few areas for improvement which need to be addressed. The Centre provides well for the majority of the young people. The staff promote a positive ethos and active learning environment which is central to the development of the Centre and a significant base upon which improvements can be secured and maintained.

A follow-up inspection will be required in some 18 months.

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