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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

Education by Choice Centre
The Bridge Community Association
Belfast

June 2009

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF THE EDUCATION BY CHOICE CENTRE, THE BRIDGE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION, BELFAST, BT6 8DR

The inspection in March 2007 identified strengths in the commitment, dedication and care the tutors showed towards the young people and the generally good working relationships established between the young people and the tutors. The report also highlighted major shortcomings in the centre's work, including the need to:

- develop a wider curriculum to meet the needs of the young people and provide them with opportunities to gain accreditation;
- ensure that the learners' pathways build upon the previous levels of attainment and enable progression;
- develop more effective teaching, learning and assessment arrangements;
- create better transition arrangements for the learners;
- ensure that effective child protection/pastoral care policies and procedures, in line with the relevant Department of Education circulars, are in place;
- ensure that leadership and management create more effective procedures and policies with regard to admissions, monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance, as well as tutor support and supervision; and
- carry out an immediate health and safety risk assessment of the Roslyn Street premises.

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work of the centre have taken place:

- the curriculum has been extended to include additional subjects, personal development support and routes to accreditation;
- initial referral forms have been introduced to detail the young people's literacy and numeracy performance levels and to help the staff plan appropriate learning programmes for each young person;
- weekly and monthly reports are completed to indicate the young people's progress;
- transition arrangements record and track the young people into further education and training;
- additional members, with relevant backgrounds and experience, have been appointed to the management committee of the centre;

- the designated and deputy designated child protection staff members have received appropriate child protection training by the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and they have disseminated this to all staff; and
- the centre no longer uses the Roslyn Street premises.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out a follow-up inspection of the centre on the 5 June 2009. There were nine young people attending at the time.

The action plan produced by the centre in response to the inspection findings was of a good quality. Good progress has been made in the areas for improvement identified during the original inspection.

The following are the most important improvements brought about by the staff and the management:

- the improved focus on accreditation and the developing opportunities the young people have to gain accreditation in a range of areas; in 2007-08, for example, nine of the eleven young people leaving the centre gained a placement in either further education courses, training programmes or employment;
- the appointment of additional part-time teaching staff with subject specialisms;
- the strong links made with community agencies which improve the young people's and their families' opportunities to benefit from the centre's provision;
- the improved attendance rates which, for a minority of young people, reach 100% over a one to two month period; and
- the continued high level of commitment of the Bridge Community management, the Education By Choice manager and staff to the young people and their well-being.

The areas which need further improvements are:

- the appointment of a full-time teacher, with post-primary experience of assessment and curriculum planning, to co-ordinate the educational planning and to raise expectations and standards;
- the staff's capacity to plan thematic lessons through accessing the BELB's support services, for example, educational psychology and the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service; and
- more purposeful working as a staff to share practices, such as the use of information and communication technology across all subjects, and a co-ordinated system of planning and reporting on the young people's progress across the curriculum.

Since the inspection, the centre evaluated the progress made in the areas for improvement identified in the original inspection. The Inspectorate recommends that the processes for self-evaluation are developed to focus more strongly on self-evaluation as a means to bring about improvement.

In most of the areas inspected, the quality of the education provided by the Education By Choice Centre is now satisfactory. The strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The centre has demonstrated evidence of improvement but significant areas for improvement in standards and teaching and learning need to be addressed if the needs of all of the learners are to be met effectively. The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the centre's progress in addressing the remaining areas for improvement.

It is a matter of some concern that most of the schools where the young people are enrolled, have not sufficiently developed with the centre, their shared responsibility for quality assuring the provision made for their pupils at the centre. It is also a matter of concern that, in spite of the significant resources now provided by the BELB, the provision, while satisfactory, still falls short of meeting the considerable needs of the young people; further support will also be needed to ensure the staff at the centre have the capacity to address the areas for improvement outlined in this report.

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