

EDUCATION AND TRAINING
INSPECTORATE

EDUCATION OTHER THAN AT SCHOOL INSPECTION

Shanmullagh EOTAS Centre, Ballinamallard,
County Fermanagh

Report of a Follow-up Inspection in November 2024

Follow-up to the Inspection of Shanmullagh Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Centre, Ballinamallard, County Fermanagh

Introduction

Shanmullagh Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) Centre is situated six miles from Enniskillen town and four miles from the village of Ballinamallard in County Fermanagh. The centre caters mostly for pupils at key stage (KS) 4 and provides a programme for a small number of pupils at KS 3, in collaboration with the referring schools. Over the last four years, the number of pupils enrolled in the centre has almost doubled and stands currently at 15 pupils, which is above the centre's stated capacity of 12 pupils. The majority of the pupils registered have a statement of educational need.

The EOTAS centre has three full-time teachers, two part-time teachers and a learning support assistant. The working patterns of the staff have been amended this year, to address the increase in enrolment. A scoping exercise to assess the centre's accommodation is under way with a view to addressing the increasing need for KS 3 provision and extending the current KS 4 provision.

The centre is currently in the process of changing its name to Enniskillen EOTAS.

Views of staff, parents/carers and referring schools

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to staff, parent/carers and referring schools in advance of the follow-up inspection.

A small number of parents/carers responded to the questionnaires and their responses were wholly positive. In written comments they reported that the centre is a safe place for their child to learn and grow and that the child's placement has impacted positively on home and family life. Most (83%) of the centre's staff responded to the questionnaire and they commented favourably on almost all aspects of the life and work of the centre. Responses were received from most (75%) of the referring schools. These responses were also wholly positive and referenced the effective communication between the EOTAS centre and the school, how EOTAS staff promote the care and welfare of the pupils and how the staff plan effectively to meet the pupils' needs. A small number of written responses highlighted the collaborative relationships and their satisfaction with the progress of the pupils.

Any individual concerns expressed by parents or staff were shared with the centre leader and a representative from the Education Authority's (EA) Service Management Team.

The inspectors held discussions with two focus groups of pupils, a focus group of parents and a focus group of staff from the referring schools. The parents who met with inspectors spoke very positively about the high levels of care and support provided for their child by the teachers. They value the ongoing communication between school and home, in particular the teachers' prompt resolution of issues. The parents highlighted the positive impact of the centre's provision, including lessons delivered at a local college of Further Education and work-related experiences, on their children's confidence and their readiness to progress to the next stage of their education and "become valuable members of society with focus and purpose", as one parent told inspectors. Discussions with representatives from a small number of the referring schools reflected the responses received in the questionnaires.

Key actions and changes

The key actions which affect the work of the EOTAS centre are set out below. The centre has received external support provided by the EA in support of these actions.

- The centre has introduced standardised cognitive testing as part of the baseline assessment of pupils when they register with the centre.
- The curriculum has been extended giving access to a wider range of vocational courses.
- The centre staff have received further professional learning on restorative approaches, anxiety-based non-attendance and trauma-informed practice.
- The teachers in the centre are included in the post-primary Fermanagh Area Learning Community which gives them access to more opportunities for professional learning, including sharing practice with their peers in mainstream schools.
- A newly built poly tunnel provides an extra learning space and features centrally in the provision of therapeutic education.
- The centre is in the process of recruiting part-time administrative support.

Key findings

- A strength of the centre's vision and mission is that they address the young people directly, assuring them that, 'A great future is within your reach'. The centre's mission commits to: celebrating each pupil's uniqueness; instilling optimism for the future; and empowering the pupils to navigate and manage life's challenges. The staff's commitment to the vision and mission is evident in every aspect of the life and work of the centre.

- The introduction of standardised cognitive testing enables the staff to plan appropriately for a flexible curriculum to meet better the needs and abilities of each new cohort of pupils registered at the centre. Importantly, it informs the balance of general and vocational subjects offered to the pupils. While the curriculum is weighted more heavily towards vocational subjects, it reflects the pupils' needs and abilities and is designed to enable them to progress.
- The curriculum is extended appropriately through the widening range of vocational courses available at the local college of further education and associated work-related learning. This blend of learning experiences is keeping most of the pupils engaged and attending. Appropriately, most of the KS 4 pupils are taking Level 2 Essential Skills in English, GCSE mathematics and a range of vocational subjects. A small number of pupils have returned to their referring schools to access aspects of the KS 4 curriculum. It will be important that the centre staff and referring schools continue to identify opportunities when this is most appropriate. A small number of pupils have returned to school for full-time study at post-16 level.
- The preventative curriculum and the therapeutic approaches adopted by the centre are linked closely and are impacting positively on the pupils' wellbeing, engagement and outcomes. The day begins with a social, nurturing breakfast session followed by a lesson focusing on how the pupils can stay safe in a wide range of real-life contexts. Individual and small group learning sessions in the poly tunnel help the pupils to understand their emotions better, including how to regulate while learning. Pupils have a hands-on experience of exploring and discovering how and why things grow; they develop skills to solve problems, reduce stress and make social connections, and receive empathy, allowing them to learn in a supportive environment. During the inspection, pupils spoke with pride about inviting local people to the centre to view and purchase produce from the poly tunnel.
- The pupils experience success through the teachers' consistent praise and encouragement, and through the celebration of their work around the centre and in the local press. In discussions with inspectors, the pupils spoke very positively about the support and understanding provided by their teachers, the progress they are making and their aspirations for their education and training at post-16.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are built on trust. The teachers know and understand well the pupils' pastoral and learning needs and adjust their teaching to engage the pupils. Relationships at all levels are supportive and friendly.
- The planning, teaching and assessment for successful learning during the inspection was effective. Approaches used by staff encourage the pupils to work independently and with their peers. Lessons include a range of appropriate activities and good pace and challenge, and transitions between learning activities are smooth and well managed. Progression and the incremental development of skills through the various levels of qualifications, as well as the wide range of accredited enrichment courses, allows the pupils to experience success and motivates them to achieve more.

- The potential re-integration of pupils to their referring schools is kept under close review by staff, notably through the use of a readiness for re-integration assessment tool. The assessment is based on the pupils' social and academic progress within the centre and includes teacher judgement and the pupils' own views. This approach is complemented by six-weekly multidisciplinary review meetings which focus appropriately on individual pupil's readiness for returning to school.
- The pupils are benefitting from the professional learning of staff. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils reported that the teachers understand them, work closely with them and go back patiently over key concepts of their subjects when required. Issues with attendance for most of the pupils have been addressed and their attendance has improved. The attendance rate of pupils at the centre is currently slightly above the service-wide average figure.

Area for action:

- further use of readiness for integration information to assess the appropriateness of more pupils accessing aspects of the KS 4 curriculum in the referring schools.

Child Protection

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the EOTAS centre demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance. All of the pupils who met with inspectors reported that they felt safe and knew what to do and who to speak to if they have any concerns about their safety or wellbeing.

Going Forward


Shanmullagh EOTAS Centre is committed to reassuring its pupils that they are valued as individuals and that a great future is within their reach. The centre provides access to a wide range of vocational courses and reviews closely the pupils' readiness for reintegration to the referring schools. The pupils appreciate the positive relationships that they have with the centre staff and enjoy the approaches used to teach them about staying safe and healthy, and emotionally well.

Through the work of the district inspector, ETI will continue to monitor the progress of Shanmullagh EOTAS Centre in addressing the area for action as laid out in this report. No further follow-up inspection is required.

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