An Roinn Oideachais

Department of Education

Alternative Education Evaluation

REPORT

Setting name	St John's Education Centre
Setting address	Holy Faith Grounds, Old Finglas Road, Glasnevin, Dublin D11 H52P
Identifying Code	NA

Date of Inspection: 10 November 2021

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WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION EVALUATION?

Alternative education evaluations report on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of supports for learners' well-being. They also focus on the quality of the management and leadership in a setting. This report affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the setting.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector(s) evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of teaching and learning
2. The quality of supports for learners' well-being
3. The quality of leadership and management

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum, which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the Setting's provision in each area.

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the setting's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the setting.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teacher/tutors visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Settings 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Settings 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all Setting personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Settings, 2017
7. Setting planning documentation indicates that the setting is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The setting met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Alternative Education Evaluation

Dates of inspection	18th -20th October and Wednesday, 10th of November 2021
Inspection activities undertaken • Meetings with centre director • Meeting with representatives of the management committee • Group meetings with parent representatives • Meeting with teachers • Teacher questionnaires • Review of relevant documents	• Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of learners' work • Interaction with learners • Group meetings with learners • Feedback to centre director and teachers

SETTING CONTEXT

St John's Education Centre is an alternative education setting located in an urban area in the grounds of the Holy Faith Convent in Glasnevin in Dublin. The centre was established in 1999 by the Holy Faith Sisters and the De La Salle Brothers.

A management committee is in place since 2002 and comprises representatives of both religious orders and volunteers. This management committee has oversight of the work of the centre. The centre's director is a volunteer and was appointed by the De La Salle brothers in 2017. The director is supported by a parent-liaison officer and a secretary. Volunteer teachers, counsellors and parents also give very generously of their time to support the work of the centre. Two full-time teaching posts are provided by the Department of Education.

The centre provides support and highly structured interventions for young adolescents at risk of dropping out of the mainstream school system. The students will typically have displayed very challenging behaviour in the mainstream setting. The centre provides students with a six-week programme.

The main aim of the programme is to provide students with the skills to manage their own behaviour with a view to maximising their engagement in mainstream schooling when they return to their school. Each programme can accommodate 8 students. At the time of this evaluation 7 students were enrolled. The students are drawn from a wide network of partner post-primary schools which are located all over Dublin and many of the students live very far away from St John's centre.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The management, staff and volunteers in St John's Education Centre are deeply committed to the founding goal of supporting their students to remain in education, and all carry out their work with great dedication.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good, and excellent practices in relation to teaching students the skills of self-management and self-regulation were evident throughout the evaluation.

- The quality of support for learners' wellbeing is excellent and a positive, affirmative atmosphere is strongly evident in the centre.
- The partnership with parents and mainstream schools is effective and is continuously being strengthened in the interests of retaining students in the education system.
- The quality of the support for student transitions into and from St John's Education Centre is exemplary and continues to be developed in an effective manner.
- The quality of leadership and management is good.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The plans to formalise the governance structure for St John's Education Centre should be expedited by the trustees.
- As considerable work has been done on strengthening the reintegration process for students back into mainstream, it is timely to start a rigorous process of data collection on student experience while in the centre, and also outcomes for graduates of the programme when they return to mainstream.
- Teachers should ensure that learner outcomes and intended success criteria are stated clearly at the start of lessons.
- Teacher modelling and the use of active learning strategies should be used in all lessons.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good with exemplary practices in evidence. There is significant expertise among the staff in relation to the delivery of Student Behaviour Management programmes.

- A review of the curriculum provided in St John's Education Centre has taken place. The key skills of junior cycle inform and underpin the teaching and learning that takes place, with a very strong emphasis on the key skills of *Managing Myself* and *Staying Well*. The staff are commended for this approach and the significant work undertaken in the review.

- Individual teacher practice was guided by a strong desire to be supportive to the learners' social and emotional wellbeing. This was done skilfully. Teachers established a calm and respectful classroom atmosphere. Teachers made very good efforts to establish and maintain positive relationships with the learners.

- The programme in St John's is essentially a behaviour intervention programme. Therefore all lessons are underpinned by developing learners' knowledge about the impact of their own behaviour and also by fostering the essential skills of self-regulation so that students can improve their behaviour. This was done to very good effect across most lessons.

- Teachers fostered the use of metacognitive strategies among learners effectively. Students learned the skills of reflecting on their own work, and on contributing and progressing in lessons. Learning this skill of self-reflection had a clear positive effect on the students' ability to manage their own behaviour and on their learning outcomes. The integration of these metacognitive strategies into classroom practice is highly commendable.

- Teachers successfully encouraged learners to stay on task and to persevere in their learning. Teachers also used praise to very good effect to increase learners' sense of achievement and sense of progress. In some lessons, teachers modelled learning activities to good effect. More use should be made of this practice which supported students' learning effectively.

- Overall, lessons were well prepared, well structured, clear and purposeful. Teachers ensured that the necessary materials and resources were ready in advance and available to the students to support their learning.

- Teachers organised a variety of learning tasks for students and generally the outcomes were best where students had the opportunity to be active in their own learning. It is suggested that all lessons be underpinned by active learning opportunities.

- Most lessons take place as group settings with an individual teacher. In some lessons visited, team teaching took place and this was highly effective. It was evident that teacher roles were clear. The support that was given to individual students was targeted and most helpful in achieving successful learning outcomes. Currently team teaching occurs when Geography and Mathematics are scheduled on the timetable. It is worth considering increasing the provision of team teaching across other curricular areas.

- In some lessons learning outcomes were written on the board. However, these were not written in terms of what knowledge or skills would be acquired by the learners. It is important to express learner outcomes in those terms so that the students are clear on what they will know or be able to do at the end of a lesson.

- The provision of lessons in the outdoor environment through Physical Education and Horticulture is very positive and the students benefit from this provision. The nearby Botanic Gardens is used as a beneficial resource for the programme.

2. THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS' WELL-BEING

- The quality of support for learners' wellbeing is excellent.

- Highly effective communication is central to all interactions with students, and staff strive to foster a positive sense of self and of belonging among the learners. Teachers take time to get to know the students as individuals and to focus strongly on their strengths. A warm and caring atmosphere was evident in the setting.

- The emphasis in the programme on developing learners' knowledge in understanding their own behaviour and its impact is critical. Equally the strong focus on teaching students the skills of self-regulation in managing potentially negative and self-destructive behaviours provides students with vital strategies to enhance their own sense of self-worth and wellbeing. This was done very well by teachers who demonstrated significant expertise in developing these skills among the students.

- Each student has an individual Student Behaviour Plan. Teachers are highly effective in providing supports for learners' wellbeing and knowledge in acquiring the essential skills of positive behaviour. The provision of structured one-to-one mentoring to all students is a key intervention to support students' success in adhering to behaviour plans.

- Student voice is fostered in a number of positive ways. Firstly in the data gathering phase before students are enrolled in the programme, they are invited to share their thoughts about school. In addition students are consulted when the Behaviour Plan is drawn up and when the weekly review is completed.

- Effective strategies have been developed in the centre to support parents. These strategies are underpinned by the strong belief that supporting parents is critical to successful outcomes for students. Meetings are held with parents prior to enrolment and throughout the programme. Support is available to parents when their children return to mainstream. This level of support is commendable. The centre has a dedicated parent-liaison officer who coordinates all of the work associated with parental partnership.

- Parents interviewed in the course of the evaluation reported that the guidance received in the centre was beneficial to them in supporting their children's wellbeing and educational journey. A key component of parental partnership is also derived from parents of past

students, who volunteer to provide peer support for parents of current students. This is very good practice.

- Partnerships with mainstream feeder schools is very good. The positive relationships and effective communication with the link teacher in those mainstream schools are crucial to the success of the programme.

- The quality of support for transitions is effective. Prior to commencing the programme a rigorous process of enrolment takes place involving all stakeholders. This process includes and demands significant commitment from parents to familiarise themselves and engage with the aims and strategies of the programme. This seeks to ensure that parents are enabled to support their child as they transition into the setting.

- The newly-introduced system of a phased transition back to the mainstream setting is an excellent support for the students. This system allows the learners to go back for one day a week over a number of weeks to their mainstream school. This is highly structured to ensure they encounter all of their teachers. Students have targets to achieve and are given the opportunity to reflect on their progress on a phased basis. This system has been developed to ensure optimal transition when they return permanently to mainstream.

- A new element of the transition programme this year has been the provision of professional development supports for the teaching staff in the network of mainstream feeder schools. The CPD focuses on developing strategies that can be used in mainstream classrooms to support learners' positive behaviour and draws on the strategies promoted in St John's such learners setting targets for themselves and developing learners' self- skills.

- Given the amount of review that has taken place and the development of the transitions processes it is timely now to begin a system of data tracking of students who attend the programme to establish the long term benefits of the programme.

- The documentation reviewed in relation to enrolment, continuous assessment and review and reintegration into mainstream provided evidence of robust systems in place to ensure effective communication and information flow between St John's and mainstream schools. These systems are critical to the success of the programme.

3. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The quality of leadership and management of the centre is effective, and some very good practices were in evidence.

- Currently a management committee has oversight of the leadership and management of the centre and fulfils this role with commitment and dedication. This committee comprises representatives from both religious orders and a number of volunteers who bring a range of expertise to bear on the committee. The management committee has attended to the development of required policies, including Child Safeguarding and Anti-Bullying policies.

- Good management practices are evidenced by the orderly running of the centre and by the efforts to ensure recruitment of suitably qualified staff. Staff deployment is very good. Effective structures are in place to ensure very good communication between management and staff and also between parents and the centre.

- The management committee has engaged in an extensive review of provision in the centre, and it is now timely to recommend formalising the governance structure of St John's Education centre.

- Very good leadership is evidenced through the commitment shown by the management committee and the centre director to the mission of the centre to give students every opportunity to develop the skills and necessary dispositions to avail of the education being provided in their mainstream schools. It was evident in the course of the evaluation that this vision permeates the work of the centre and is the driving force for members of staff and volunteers.

- Leadership of learning needs to be developed further both at management committee level and through the director of the centre. The recommendations around teaching and learning will be useful in the development of this aspect of leadership.

- There is commitment to availing of professional development among staff. As part of the leadership role of the management committee and director, it is recommended that structures be put in place to ensure formal sharing of this expertise and learning for all staff, and that learning can be applied in the setting.

- The development of leadership capacity is good. This is promoted through the team teaching structure and the constant communication among staff. Consideration might be given to what systems could be put in place to develop leadership capacity among students.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the Setting using the Inspectorate's quality continuum, which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the of quality the Setting's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	***Very good*** applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some Settings in this category the quality of what is evaluated is ***outstanding*** and provides an example for other Settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	***Good*** applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of learners' learning. The Setting needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a *very good* standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	***Satisfactory*** applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	***Fair*** applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The Setting will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learners' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	***Weak*** applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-Setting action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;