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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

North-Eastern Education and Library Board Youth Service in the Ballymena Area

Inspected: October 2006

CONTENTS

Section		Page
1.	CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND	1
2.	EVIDENCE BASE	1
3.	STRENGTHS	2
4.	AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT	4
5.	CONCLUSION	4
	APPENDIX	

1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

1.1 The North-Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB) Youth Service operates under the direction of an Assistant Senior Education Officer (ASEO) and a Deputy Head of Youth Service. The responsibilities for the four divisions of the NEELB Youth Service are under the direction of Area Youth Officers (AYO). In addition, the service has a cohort of professional youth workers under the direction of a Senior Youth Officer (Projects).

1.2 The NEELB Youth Service Strategy (2006-2007) outlines the principles which underpin youth work in the NEELB; these are: personal and social development; participation; partnership; reconciliation; targeting social need and equity, diversity and interdependence. Emphasis is placed on supporting adolescents in their developmental transition from childhood to adulthood. According to information supplied by the organisations the NEELB Youth Service provides a broad range of services designed to support and develop young people. The population of the area served by the NEELB is approximately 399,000, of which 120,575 are within the Youth Service age range of 4-25 years. In addition to funding from the Department of Education (DE) the service has secured a number of different types of external funding. Since 1999 the managers of the service have sought to review and develop the provision that is offered to young people and consequently, a number of changes in the organisation and structure of the service have been implemented. In 2002 and again in 2006 the NEELB Youth Service received the Charter Mark Award in recognition of the quality of the service.

1.3 In October 2006 the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) carried out an inspection of NEELB Youth Services in the Ballymena area. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate and report on the nature, range and quality of youth services provided through NEELB within the Ballymena area. This area forms part of the division of the NEELB Youth Service that includes Antrim and Moyle. The NEELB youth provision within the area includes one youth tutor attached to a post-primary school, two youth centres each with a part-time leader-in-charge, and 105 uniformed and voluntary youth clubs which are registered with, and grant-aided by, NEELB. In addition, two of the cohorts of full-time professional youth workers are deployed in the Ballymena area.

1.4 Child protection policies and procedures were evaluated by the inspection team; in the main these were found to comply with current legislation in almost all of the statutory groups. There is a need to ensure that parents are aware of the child protection policy and procedures. In a minority of voluntary registered organisations there is a need to ensure those working with young people are vetted and receive child protection training on a regular basis.

2. EVIDENCE BASE

2.1 A team of four inspectors visited the area for a two-week period in October 2006. Pre-inspection meetings were held with the ASEO, the Deputy Head of Youth Service and the AYO prior to the inspection. At the beginning of the inspection a meeting was held with the full staff team. Each member of the team made useful presentations about his or her own area of responsibility within the area. Members of the inspection team outlined the inspection process and shared relevant documentation and guidance.

2.2 Members of the inspection team observed a total of 46.5 hours of direct youth work practice over 20 sessions and discussions took place with over 100 young people. Two different members of the inspection team visited the larger part-time youth centre and the youth provision within the post-primary school.

2.3 During the course of the inspection 12% of registered groups were visited including part-time youth centres, uniformed organisations, the local youth council and community groups.

2.4 Meetings took place with the ASE0, the Deputy Head of the Youth Service, school principals, the youth tutor, all full-time staff and leaders-in-charge of part-time units as well as 24 part-time staff, volunteers and eleven parents.

2.5 A wide range of documentation provided by the organisation was examined prior to and during the inspection.

3. **STRENGTHS**

3.1 The safe and caring environment across the full range of settings, including centre-based, outreach and detached, reported by the young people and their parents.

3.2 The excellent quality of working relationships between young people and youth workers in almost all of the youth settings, which provides a sound basis for the young people's personal and social development. The good efforts of the youth workers to promote the personal and social development of the young people using the service.

An example of the young people's personal and social development is well illustrated by the Ballykeel Citizenship and Employability Project. This project offered the young people a range of training opportunities, and increased their employability as a result of job-sampling and the opportunity to obtain a driving licence. This project was funded through the Ballymena Strategic Partnership, delivered by the Area Youth Worker and the part-time centre leader, and targeted 150 young people between eleven to 20 years of age. The overall aim was to provide the target group with opportunities to:

- enhance life opportunities;
- increase participation;
- enhance self-esteem and confidence; and
- increase employability.

The project had two distinct strands that looked separately at citizenship and employability.

At the end of the project 142 young people had gained formal or informal certificates. All 50 young people targeted in the "Drive-4-Life" strand of the project completed 19 driving lessons, 43 passed the driving theory, eleven booked to complete the driving test and four were successful.

3.3 The dedication and commitment of the AYO who has established good working relationships among the area team and also acknowledged by the sample of registered groups visited during the inspection. The AYO also provides effective support and supervision for the senior youth worker. The support is well-structured and focused with clear action points to achieve appropriate outcomes. The senior youth worker also provides good quality support for part-time centre leaders, part-time youth workers and volunteers.

3.4 The youth work practice observed, in most cases, ranged from satisfactory to excellent. The features of the best practice observed included the following:

- clear objectives understood by the participants;
- the activities and tasks catered for various levels of ability;
- inclusion of all young people attending the centre;
- young people identifying the value of the experience and the usefulness of skills learnt for other situations;
- the sense of enjoyment reported by most young people; and
- whole group evaluation.

3.5 The contribution of registered groups who provide for the needs of children and young people in local settings. At the time of the inspection 105 groups had registered in 2006/07 with a total membership of 6,653 children and young people consisting of the following groups:

- 63 Uniformed Groups (eg Guides, Scouts, Girls' Brigade, etc);
- 39 Youth Clubs; and
- 3 Young Farmers' Clubs.

These registered groups rely entirely on volunteers who often give years of service to a particular group. The dedication and enthusiasm of these volunteers within the area makes a valuable contribution to the quality of the lives of the children and young people who attend these groups weekly.

3.6 The good quality of support structures provided by the area youth office staff team that assists the registered groups to deliver the core curriculum. The senior youth worker and community relations officer also provide good curriculum support to these registered groups and encourage them to access training provided through the NEELB Youth Service.

3.7 The good range of opportunities for the young people to progress to leadership and enhance their employability through a range of accredited training courses including:

- Senior Member Development;
- Trainee Leader;
- 'Drive-4-Life';
- Youth Council; and
- Citizenship and Employability.

Adults are also encouraged and supported to complete accredited courses including Open College Network (OCN) 'Introduction to Youth Work'. The priority given to providing training is strategic in creating and maintaining sufficient numbers of suitably trained young people and adults to deliver youth work across the area.

3.8 The good quality of youth work in schools delivered by the Area Youth Workers. This work has been developed over time and it is based on a clear rationale, which has been accepted by the participating schools. Recent developments include collaborative intervention provided by the area youth workers, educational psychologist, and education welfare officers.

3.9 The efficient service provided by all the administration staff in office locations throughout the area.

4. AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

4.1 There is a need for strategic long-term planning, to address the needs of young people and the particular issues identified within the Ballymena area.

4.2 There is a need for a systematic approach to the measurement of the outcomes for young people and for these to impact on subsequent planning and delivery.

4.3 There is a need for the role and deployment of the senior youth worker to be reviewed.

4.4 There is a need to review the management structures and deployment of all the full-time staff working in the Ballymena area.

4.5 There is a need for the Youth Council to, be more representative of the young people within the local area, to increase its membership and to devise a suitable action plan to guide the development of the work.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The organisation has strengths in many aspects of its youth service provision. The inspection has identified a few areas for improvement in important areas, which need to be addressed in order to meet the needs of all the young people.

The Inspectorate will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing these areas for improvement.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

1. The unsuitability of the youth office premises for working with young people.
2. The poor condition of the Broughshane Youth Centre premises.

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