Tithe an Oireachtais
Houses of the Oireachtas

An Coiste um Oideachas, Breisoideachas agus Ardoideachas, Taighde, Nuálaíocht agus Eolaíocht

An Coiste um Oideachas, Breisoideachas agus Ardoideachas, Taighde, Nuálaíocht agus Eolaíocht cuairt ar Ionaid Oideachais Moinseo agus Dóchas

Deireadh Fómhair 2022

Joint Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science visit to Mountjoy and Dóchas Education Centres

33/ES/11

October 2022

Table of Contents

Introduction 2

Mountjoy Education Centre 2

Dóchas Education Centre 4

Conclusion 5

APPENDIX 1 – Members of the Delegation from the Joint Committee 6

ACCOMPANYING STAFF 6

APPENDIX 2 – Programme for Visit 7

AGENDA 7

APPENDIX 3 – Mountjoy Education Centre Staff List 8

APPENDIX 4 – Dóchas Education Centre Staff List 8

Introduction

On 5th July 2022, the Joint Committee held a public meeting to discuss:

1. the IRELAND PRISON EDUCATION STRATEGY 2019 – 2022 with Officials from the Irish Prison Service (IPS) and ETBI and
2. current and Future Education Provision in Irish Prisons with representatives of the Irish Prison Education Association (IEPA).

At the meeting the IPS extended an invitation to visit the Education Centre in one or more of the State's Prison(s).

It was agreed to send a delegation on a Study Visit to the Mountjoy and Dóchas Education Centres at a Committee meeting in private session on 12 July 2022.

The Committee was represented on the visit by Deputies Paul Kehoe (Chairman), Jim O'Callaghan; Marc Ó'Cathasaigh and Senator Eileen Flynn. The delegation was accompanied by Tara Kelly, Committee Clerk, Niamh Murray, Policy Advisor and David Kilcoyne, Junior Clerk.

Mountjoy Education Centre

The visit began with a meeting in the boardroom of Mountjoy Prison with Mr. Eddie Mullins, Mountjoy Governor; Ms Anne Costelloe, Head Teacher, Mountjoy Education Centre; Mr Fergal Black, Director of Care and Rehabilitation; and Mr Paddy Moran, Chief Officer, Class 1.

The delegation was then taken on a tour of the Education Centre and met with teachers and students.

The following key issues were raised:

- **School Closures have been necessitated by Prison Officer Shortages and Security Concerns, where prisoners are under special protection. In addition, the school hours are too short.**

- Prisoner numbers are increasing post pandemic, and this may result in further school closures and general lack of access to educational services.
- Often prisoners who are most in need of the education service have least access because they are under special protection or have severe addiction or mental health issues.
- The Education Centre encourages prisoners to come initially and engage with the Centre. This often leads to course progression and attainment of qualifications. However, the Education Centre's fundamental aim is to increase prisoner participation in education as distinct from achieving qualifications. Ultimately, education should serve as a key part of rehabilitation, giving a person confidence and hope to build a different future on release.
- The Education Centre is viewed by the students as a calm, safe space where they have respite from the difficulties of daily living in a prison environment.
- Many courses also teach life skills and allow students to experience aspects of life that are withheld from them during incarceration. For example, cookery classes also allow students to sit together and eat communally afterwards.
- There is no access to educational psychologists for inmates. As many present with learning difficulties such as dyslexia and psychological issues, this can be a big challenge.
- There is a need for greater links with primary and post-primary schools, specifically in the North East Inner City (NEIC) as a preventative measure in the first place, given the high levels of illiteracy and lack of basic numeracy in the prison population. Early School Leaving (ESL) has been cited consistently as one of the key reasons for perpetuating cycles of social deprivation and disadvantage. Early intense intervention can be hugely transformative in breaking this cycle and providing other pathways in life.
- The Education Centre has a very positive impact on student's mental health, giving students more confidence and hope for the future and negating anxiety and other related issues.

- A student from the yoga class spoke to Members about how important the Education Centre facilities are to them and how important it is to have them open and available.
- **The School Library is currently closed due to staff shortages. The Library needs to be reopened on a daily basis including weekends as a matter of urgency.**

Dóchas Education Centre

The delegation met Ms Caron McCaffery, the Director General of the Irish Prison Service; Mr. Martin Galgey, Dóchas Governor; Ms Rose Kerrigan Head Teacher; and Ms Mc Dermott, Chief Officer Class 2.

The delegation was then taken on a tour of the Education Centre and met with teachers and students.

- Blended learning courses are available to the prisoners in Dóchas. A Spanish course commenced this summer as a pilot initiative and will be rolled out to all other prisons shortly.
- There is a prison television channel which facilitates prisoners with low literacy levels. There is also a collaboration with Trinity College Dublin regarding technology assisted learning.
- Initiatives such as games-based learning help prisoners engage with the Education Centre and again, as in Mountjoy Education Centre, the importance of participation and engagement as well as the emotional support that is gained, is fundamentally important, as distinct from attaining formal qualifications.
- Mental health and addiction issues are experienced by most prisoners. The need for a trauma-informed response and early intervention was highlighted.

While there is a library service, there is currently no dedicated library space in Dóchas. Building work is scheduled to commence and a library room will be completed soon.

The delegates were then taken to the training café "*Bean Inside*" which is run by barista students, for tea and coffee and cakes prepared by the barista students.

Conclusion

Both Education Centres have achieved a huge amount and it was clear that they are highly valued by the prison population. **The main issue that arose, when speaking with students in Mountjoy Education Centre, was their desire to have more hours available in the schools.** This is a hugely positive indication of the good work being done there. It also indicates that many prisoners are interested in learning and raises fundamental questions on their earlier educational experiences and why they did not progress through the system.

It was also highlighted that many of the emergency measures, taken during the Covid-19 pandemic, have been very successful and will be maintained. Several courses are now available on the prison television service and these can be distributed throughout it. However, remote learning is viewed as a complementary measure and will not replace in-person teaching and learning.

The Prison Service has been given an allocation in the recent budget to recruit more staff, however, this will take time. In the interim, the students who use and rely on the Education Centre services continue to suffer the effects of the school closures.

The School Library in Mountjoy Prison should be opened as a key priority. This is the single most important outcome the delegation would like to see from the visit.

The delegation would like to thank the Irish Prison Service, the Education Centre in Mountjoy and the Education Centre in Dóchas for engaging with it so positively and for all their hospitality and assistance. The delegation learned a lot from the visit which was truly thought provoking and inspiring.

APPENDIX 1 – Members of the Delegation from the Joint Committee

Paul Kehoe TD Fine Gael
(Cathaoirleach)

Jim O'Callaghan TD
Fianna Fáil

Marc O Cathasaigh TD
Green Party

Senator Eileen Flynn
Independent

ACCOMPANYING STAFF

Tara Kelly, Clerk

Niamh Murray, Policy Advisor

David Kilcoyne, Junior Clerk

APPENDIX 2 – Programme for Visit

AGENDA

10.30am	Tea/coffee in the Boardroom in Mountjoy Prison, meet with Care and Rehabilitation Director, Governor, Chiefs and Head Teacher. Opportunity to set the context, explore challenges & future developments, and general Q & A.
11.00am	Visit Education Centre in the Mountjoy Prison.
11.45am	Visit to the Hang House/prison museum.
12.00pm	Leave for Dochas Centre
12.15pm	Education Committee arrives in Dochas to meet with Governors and Chiefs & Head Teacher
12.20pm	Tour of downstairs and upstairs classrooms - invited to visit the various classes and talk to our learners and their teachers. Open Learning Centre to look at: • BL Course List • Blended Learning courses for Prison TV • Dochas Newsletter • Games Based Learning • Learner Voice • Story Mams • Red Cross • Book Creator & Nearpods • Technology & Digital Literacy
1:00pm	Coffee in *Bean Inside* - Barista Training & Horticulture – Collaboration between IPS and CDETB
1.45 pm	Depart Dóchas Education Centre

APPENDIX 3 – Mountjoy Education Centre Staff List

Ms Caron McCaffery, Director General Irish Prison Service

Mr Fergal Black, Director of Care and Rehabilitation

Mr Eddie Mullins, Governor Mountjoy

Ms Anne Costelloe, Head Teacher, Mountjoy Education Centre

Mr Paddy Moran, Chief Officer Class 1

APPENDIX 4 – Dóchas Education Centre Staff List

Ms Rose Kerrigan, Head Teacher, Dóchas Education Centre

Mr Martin Galgey, Governor Dóchas Centre

Ms Dermott, Chief Officer Class 2

Houses of the Oireachtas
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2
D02 XR20

www.oireachtas.ie
Tel: +353 (0)1 6183000 or 076 1001700
Twitter: @OireachtasNews

Connect with us

Download our App

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play