

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS**

**RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS OF JOINT INSPECTORATE AND NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (NEPS) VISITS TO EDUCATION SETTINGS IN EMERGENCY RECEPTION AND ORIENTATION CENTRES (EROCs)**

Actions arising from the report	Response from Department/other departments and agencies – Actions completed, underway or planned
<p><b><i>Engagement with Department of Justice and Equality</i></b></p> <p>Discussions are taking place between officials in the Department of Justice and Equality and the Department of Education and Skills on the educational provision in the EROCs. This evaluation suggests that the following need to be examined with Department of Justice and Equality in the context of these discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While EROCs were intended to provide short-term accommodation for refugee families, there is a need to quantify the actual time being spent in the centres by these families.</li> <li>• The Department of Education and Skills needs to consider how best to co-operate closely to achieve enrolment and integration of refugee children in the local schools after a suitable and brief period of orientation.</li> <li>• In the interest of child safeguarding, sufficient staffing needs to be in place in the EROC schools to ensure that pupils leaving classrooms are accompanied by a responsible adult.</li> </ul>	<p>The provision of accommodation in EROCs is intended to be short-term. However, families have been accommodated for longer than originally anticipated. This situation is likely to continue, therefore the role of the Department of Education and Skills is to ensure that education needs are met irrespective of accommodation provision timelines.</p> <p>As recommended by the Report, primary school age children will be provided with on-site education in an EROC school for a maximum period of 3 months. Children may enrol in local schools prior to this period of 3 months if they are school ready, where possible.</p> <p>Post-primary students will be enrolled in local mainstream as soon as possible and when the student is school ready. In these cases, the student may transition to mainstream on a transitional basis with full integration in mainstream school within a period of 3 months.</p> <p>The possibility of having EROC staff available to support this was raised with the Department of Justice and Equality. However it was considered that schools operate independently of EROC staff who are employed by contractors for specific roles which does not extend to this role. The staffing resources required will be discussed in the context of discussions with Education and Training Boards (ETBs) on staffing for EROC schools.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The range of therapies available to learners in the settings needs to be considered, and this issue may also arise in discussions between the two departments and the Department of Health (See below).</li> <li>• The evaluation did not consider whether the numbers of learners arriving at EROCs may grow or decline in the future. Clearly, information on this point, if available, would be useful for the Department of Education and Skills in considering how best to address several of the issues raised in the evaluation. It is understood that, as a result of a recent public procurement process (which took place after the evaluation visits were undertaken) some of the EROC centres may cease to operate as such and new ones may open. This means that issues identified in the report, including integration into mainstream schools, will continue to be challenges into the foreseeable future.</li> <li>• Better information flows between the Departments of Justice and Equality, and Education and Skills, would significantly enhance decision-making around school placements and better support sustainable integration</li> </ul>	<p>The provision of therapies and assessments are normally a matter for the HSE, or funded Section 38/39 agencies. HSE has confirmed that a Community Health Worker/Support Worker in the EROC links the residents with services, when referrals are made by appropriate professionals. Services are provided in the context of available resources.</p> <p>The Department of Justice and Equality has confirmed that this is a very fluid situation which will be subject to ongoing review. However, centres are likely to continue having school going children as Ireland will largely identify families for resettlement</p> <p>A Protocol/ Service Level Agreement will be put in place to give clarity in relation to communications.</p>
<p><b><i>Department of Education and Skills school recognition</i></b>  The evaluation points to the need for clarity regarding the possible recognition of the schools or the creation of other mechanisms whereby the funding and regulation of the schools may be placed on a more satisfactory footing. The issues involved include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils in direct provision centres usually attend their local schools. Consideration needs to be given to whether the intended transitional nature of EROCs differs sufficiently from direct provision centres to justify the operation of separate EROC schools.</li> </ul>	<p>EROC centres, which cater for persons arriving under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme (IRPP), differ to direct provision centres in terms of the timing of arrival of residents. Persons entering the state under the IRPP are brought to the State in groups, and hence groups of families can arrive simultaneously at relatively short notice. In some cases children will have had significant gaps in their prior formal education or poor English language skills.</p> <p>In terms of logistics, it is therefore considered that provision of education in an EROC setting is useful initially. It allows for a period of adaption prior to entering mainstream schools, and also for provision to be made in mainstream schools to plan to accommodate the numbers of pupils involved.</p>

- Given that three schools are in operation, consideration need to be given to whether the Department of Education and Skills should recognise these settings as schools, and whether this could set precedents for other educational centres set up on an “ad hoc” basis.

- If the schools in EROCs remain unrecognised consideration needs to be given to how the Department of Education and Skills can specify regulations for them, especially with regard to “Time in School”, subject choice and teacher qualifications.

The issue of recognition of these centres as schools has been considered in consultation with relevant Business Units within the Department.

It has been concluded that this is not an appropriate course of action as the aim of the education provision in EROC is to provide an initial settling-in period to familiarise children with the Irish school system and to transition children as quickly as possible into mainstream schools. The intention therefore is that the EROC school will fulfil needs in terms of initial orientation but that children will move to mainstream school as soon as they are considered “school ready” and no more than 3 months after arrival.

The recognition of EROC as recognised schools carries with it additional statutory and regulatory requirements, such as the formation of a board of management. Section 14 of the Education Act, 1998 places a duty on the patron of a recognised school to appoint, where practicable, a board of management. The patron is the person recognised as such by the Minister in accordance with section 8 of the Act. The board must manage the school on behalf of the patron and section 15 of the Act sets out the functions of the board. There is no Patron currently involved in these centres.

These centres by their nature are short-term facilities and do not have a long term requirement. The ETBs are ideally suited to manage the educational provisions within the EROCs due to their experience in providing education in many different and diverse settings. In addition, the flexibility of the model as it stands is beneficial in that it enables the provision of education during holiday periods. The lack of formal recognition does not mean that supports will not be available. The Department of Education and Skills will arrange for appropriate supports to be provided, in consultation with ETBs.

The Department of Education and Skills is in the process of consulting with ETBs in relation to on site education provision in EROCs in order to determine the governance and structure, the resources and supports needed in EROCs to maximise educational outcomes for children in EROC’s and to build capacity of teachers to meet the diverse needs of the children.

<p><b><i>Encouraging local schools to enrol pupils from EROC centres</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The evaluation points to the challenges to be faced in supporting or encouraging or requiring local schools to enrol pupils from the EROCs.</li> </ul>	<p>Based on experience to date, it is considered likely that in the short to medium term, children residing in EROCs will be residing there for longer periods than originally envisaged. This is outside the control of the Department of Education and Skills and TusLA, but the overarching concern from an education perspective is that educational needs of the children are met appropriately.</p> <p>The Department of Education and Skills position, based on the literature and international best practice that it is better that refugee children, after an initial reception period, be placed in mainstream schools in the locality of the EROC, rather than having them segregated a separate EROC School setting for longer than is necessary.</p> <p>The initial mainstream placement will essentially be a transitional placement pending the eventual move of children to their permanent homes and schools. The relevant business sections in the Department of Education and Skills have considered the issues raised in relation to EROC schools and consideration has been also been given to supporting this transitional placement process pending a subsequent move to a permanent school.</p> <p>Supports will be provided to EROC schools to include linkage with local schools to support the transitioning of children to mainstream school. The requirements to enable and encourage local schools to enrol children from EROC's are currently under consideration.</p>
<p><b><i>Liaison with Tusla</i></b> It is suggested that liaison is required with Tusla.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The role of Tusla's Education Welfare Officer (EWO) for the effective transfer of children from EROC provision to local schools needs to be clarified.</li> </ul>	<p>Tusla Educational Welfare Services (EWS) play a key role in relation to accessing school places for young people in EROC's. The local EWO is responsible for facilitating the transition arrangements for these children to mainstream schools and thereafter to their permanent schools.</p>

***Supports for students***

Consideration needs to be given to:

- Given that the EROC schools currently fulfil a valuable role in orientation and transition for their pupils, the Department of Education and Skills needs to examine how to remove obstacles (roll number and subsequent recognition) which prevent these schools accessing National Council for Special Education (NCSE) support, National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS support and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for EROC teachers. The resource implications of extending these supports to the schools need to be considered by Special Education Section and Teacher Education Section.
- Consideration needs to be given to the range of psychological, counselling and therapeutic services required by learners in EROCs; the agencies that should be involved in their delivery (the HSE, etc.); and how the provision of these services should be coordinated. These matters needs to be examined in the discussions between the Departments of Justice and Equality and Education and Skills about the centres and the discussions should also involve the HSE.
- In light of the vulnerability of this group of learners, the inspectorate is recommending that EROCs be subject to annual inspection. This will have resource implications for the Inspectorate.

Resources and access to additional supports will be provided to EROC teachers. Teachers in EROCs will be able to avail of appropriate CPD and the advice and support of NEPS, the Inspectorate and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)

As above. The provision of therapies and assessments are normally a matter for the HSE, or funded Section 38/39 agencies. HSE has confirmed that a Community Health Worker/Support Worker in the EROC links the residents with services, when referrals are made by appropriate professionals. Services are provided in the context of available resources.

Arrangements will be made between the Department of Education and Skills and Department of Justice and Equality to facilitate annual inspections of the EROC schools by the Inspectorate. Given that the EROC schools are not recognised schools, a Memorandum of Understanding will be put in place so that inspections can be arranged. This is similar to arrangements in place where inspections take place in educational facilities which are not “recognised schools”.