

**ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION
ASSESSMENT &
REGISTRATION**

Section 14 Education (Welfare) Act, 2000

**Assessment of Education
in places other than Recognised Schools**

**Independent School
Preliminary Assessment Report**

Name of School

TFA Elite-High Performance Academy

Address

UL Sports Arena, University of Limerick, Sreelane
Limerick

Name of Principal/Director

Mr. Tommy Heffernan

Name of Assessor/s

Billy Lawlor

Date of Assessment

12th October 2023

Date of Final Report

31st January 2024

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Section 1 Background Information

1.1. School Hours

Opening Time:	09:00		
Closing time:	15:00		
Main breaks during the day:	10:45	to	11:00
	13:15	to	13:45

Is school in operation for more than five years?

	No
04/09/2023	

If no, please give date on which school commenced operation

1.2. Name(s) of principal and/or other teacher(s) interviewed

(Normally interview should take place with the principal)

Mr. Tommy Heffernan

1.3. Sources of evidence on which report is based

This assessment report is based on the following sources of evidence:

- Information furnished in the annual update form R2 completed by the principal
- An interview with the principal, Mr. Tommy Heffernan
- A visit to the school location and a review of the facilities available
- Examination of and discussion about the educational programme proposed

Section 2 General Information and School Context

TFA Elite-High Performance Academy was founded by its principal, Mr. Tommy Heffernan, to provide an environment that offers its students space to learn, mature and develop as elite soccer players. The programme is aimed at transition year students and mixes the study of academic subjects with sporting and personal development. In this way it is hoped that the course will offer talented young footballers an opportunity to pursue their football ambitions in a setting that widely promotes their educational development. There are sixteen students attending the programme. Fifteen of these students are boys and there is one girl attending the course. The selection of students for attendance on the course is based on sporting ability and appropriate academic commitment. Fifteen of the students are signed to League of Ireland clubs and are considered to be players of high potential. The course is funded by the fees charged to the students. Students obtain commitments from their respective schools that a place will be available for them to complete their senior cycle examination programme. Students who do not receive a commitment may still attend the course but are aware that alternative arrangements may have to be made by them to secure a school place to enable them to complete their leaving certificate programme.

Section 3 The Principal and Staff

Staffing consists of a principal/academy director, two coaching staff and one administrator. The academic elements in the course are the responsibilities of two fully qualified teachers who are also currently studying for post-graduate degrees.

The principal/academy director assumes responsibility for the day-to-day running of the academy. He does not receive any support from outside agencies. Funding is based solely on fees charged. He is hopeful that some partners will come on board in the future and is actively exploring possibilities in this area.

The principal is a fully qualified teacher who is currently on career break from his school.

Section 4 Time Devoted to Education

The school is open from 09.00 to 15.00 each day. There is a 15-minute morning break and a half-hour lunch break. The school will be in operation this year for 154 days. The school generally follows the prescribed hours and holiday periods for mainstream schools. Attendance was described by the principal as good.

Section 5 The Learning Environment

The TFA-Elite Academy is based on the campus of the University of Limerick. The academic activities take place in a spacious classroom. The football element of the programme takes place in different areas throughout the day such as the training pitches, gymnasium, and sports hall. The University of Limerick Sports Arena is modern and spacious and provides adequate accommodation and resources for the delivery of the programme. The Academy has the 50M national swimming pool available to the participants as well as the indoor arena sports hall. The indoor arena operates four multi-purpose courts for badminton, basketball, volleyball, and indoor soccer. It also includes a 60M indoor sprint track, and a 225m jogging track. There is also a health and performance centre onsite which contains synthetic pitches and a natural turf pitch.

Section 6 The Educational Activities

6.1. General information

This is a programme for transition year students which gives participants an opportunity to meet their educational needs as well as developing their football skills. Students combine the study of academic subjects with coach education courses, workshops in diet and nutrition and physical demands of performance athletic development and football training.

The teaching of English is formally timetabled for 1.5 hours per week while Mathematics is taught for 2.25 hours per week. The academic coursework is structured around project-based learning activities where students work on real world problems or challenges and apply their learning to develop creative solutions. Students are therefore developing their critical thinking problem solving and teamwork skills. Recognition is given to the differing learning needs of each student by developing individual learning plans.

6.2. Language and literacy skills

The English curriculum is designed to help students develop their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. There is a focus on sports related topics in all aspects of the course. The curriculum covers a range of literary genres including poetry, fiction and non-fiction. It includes texts related to sports such as biographies, sports journalism and sports commentary.

Student's comprehension skills are enhanced by pupil participation in activities such as the critical analysis of sports related texts, biographies and news stories and how to identify the main ideas and themes of these texts. Writing activities are undertaken that include opinion pieces, sports journalism and creative writing. Students are taught to communicate effectively through participation in activities that include making presentations, developing debating skills and delivering speeches. Students are also taught how to critically analyse sports-related texts and how to identify the main ideas and themes within these texts. Students are assigned writing assignments and are asked to give oral presentations on a regular basis. It is proposed that all students will participate in group projects that are sports related and will involve the development of collaborative working skills. The curriculum

therefore in English is designed to give students mastery of their reading, writing and speaking skills with a focus on sports-related topics.

6.3. Numeracy

The programme in Mathematics is designed to help students to develop their problem-solving skills with a focus on sport-related scenarios. The programme covers a range of mathematical concepts including geometry, algebra, statistics and probability. Key features of the programme include sports analytics, financial management and performance analysis. Sports analytics teaches students how to use statistical analysis to interpret sports data and making informed decisions such as analysing player performance. Financial management covers topics such as budgeting, contracts and endorsements. The programme in performance analysis teaches students how to analyse and improve their own performance in sports such as tracking their progress over time or setting goals based on performance data.

6.4. Irish

The study of Irish is not part of the provision.

Children attending an Independent School should be afforded opportunity for the study of Irish, however the study of Irish is not a requirement for registration under Section 14 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. Where Irish is included in the provision, an Independent School may identify students attending that they consider would qualify for an exemption from the study of Irish. Independent Schools can make decisions in consultation with parents regarding arrangements for these children. Any arrangements made in relation to the study of Irish does not entitle students to an exemption from the study of Irish in the event of a subsequent enrolment at a Department of Education recognised school.

Parents of children attending an Independent School should be informed of and acquaint themselves with implications of not taking Irish and/or having a second language. Parents seeking information should consult with the Department of Education www.education.ie and/or the State Examinations Commission www.examinations.ie with regard to the requirement for Irish and/or an additional language.

6.5. Other areas of learning

The timetable submitted with the application indicated the range of activities and learning situations in which students receive tuition in the school. Areas covered include athletics development/strength and conditioning, physical demands of performance, player development, coach education, diet and nutrition, analysing performance in sports, psychology in sports/soccer and events management. All these areas are directed at the overall development of the students in their capacity as elite sports people and are focused on influencing present and future opportunities that may be presented to the students.

6.6. Special educational needs

One student presents with dyslexia. The principal indicated how assistive technology is creatively used to facilitate the learning of this student.

Section 7 Assessment and Record Keeping

The principal outlined in his application and subsequent interview the comprehensive and diverse range of assessment methods that reflect the varied learning experiences and goals of the academy's students. The academic component of the programme is regularly assessed. Project-based assessments are used to evaluate student's learning and progress. These assessments may take the form of evaluation of presentations, research papers and case studies and are aimed at identifying the development of relevant skills and competencies such as critical thinking, problem solving and meaningful communication. Student portfolios are also maintained and used to give a comprehensive view of each student's development. Students are also encouraged to engage in self-assessment and peer assessment activities. Regular mentorship and feedback give students a real-time sense of the progress they are making while attending the academy. Parents also have access to records of their own child's work on the academy's web platform.

Section 8 Other Relevant Information

The school's application also provided a number of policy and certification documents. The following is a summary of documents provided:

- School calendar and timetable
- Health and Safety policy statement
- Safeguarding and Welfare: all staff vetted by National Vetting Bureau
- Child Safeguarding statement as required by the Children's First Act 2015
- Fire safety policy
- Insurance arrangements.
- Storage and administration of medicine policy
- Transition year curriculum

Section 9 Evaluation of the Education Provision and Recommendations

In my opinion, the education provided to the pupils in Thomond Football Academy-Elite can be characterised as "a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social". The reasons I have formed this opinion of the educational provision in the school are as follows:

- The quality of leadership and management offered by the principal
- The range and variety of curricular provision in English and Mathematics available to the pupils

- The employment of suitably qualified staff
- Commitment to curricular planning and preparation, as well as regular reporting to parents on pupils' learning progress
- Provision of learning support to pupils with learning needs
- A rich variety of resources available to enhance teaching and learning, both within classrooms and in the school's campus facilities
- The provision of well-resourced and spacious room in which learning activities take place.

The findings of the assessment were discussed with the participants on the date of the assessment. The participants were advised that the decision regarding registration would be made by Tusla – the Child and Family Agency: Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS).

Following the assessment, a draft report is provided to the principal, along with a Factual Accuracy and Feedback Form, which may be submitted within a specified timeframe, in response to the content of the draft report. The report, along with any information provided on the feedback form for consideration, is brought to the AEARS Registration Panel. The Registration Panel make decisions regarding registration of children in receipt of the education at the Independent School.

Section 10 Discussion of Finding of Report with Principal

The report was discussed with Mr. Tommy Heffernan, principal, and it was stated that the recommendation would be to register the pupils of Thomond Football Academy - TFA Elite-High Performance Academy on the register. The final decision regarding registration will be made by the Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service (AEARS) - Tusla, Child and Family Agency.

Section 11 Outcome

Outcome of Tusla Alternative Education Assessment and Registration Service Panel Regarding Requirements for Section 14 Registration of Children Attending the School

Following the Assessment, the Registration Panel decided that children attending Thomond Football Academy-Elite School will be registered on the register of children receiving an education in a place other than a recognised school as required by Section 14 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.

Registration is subject to a periodic review by the Child and Family Agency