An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

EVALUATION of CENTRES FOR EDUCATION 2013

REPORT

Clara Youthreach, Clara, Co. Offaly
Roll no. YR0078

Date of evaluation: 18 October 2013
EVALUATION OF CENTRES OF EDUCATION

Introduction
A focussed evaluation of Clara Youthreach Centre was undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in October 2013. During that evaluation, aspects of the centre’s work in relation to attendance, retention, progression, attainment, literacy, numeracy, and life skills were reviewed. The evaluation involved interviews with centre personnel, review of centre documents and records, observation of teaching and learning and other activities, questionnaires for learners, staff and parents, and focus group meetings with learners and parents. Following the evaluation, a meeting to discuss the findings was held with: the centre co-ordinator, staff, board chairperson, and Laois-Offaly Education and Training Board Management (ETB). The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Clara Youthreach was founded in 2001 and is one of three Youthreach centres in County Offaly. It is centrally located in Clara and serves a wide rural catchment area. The centre is designated as a twenty-five place centre but currently there are eleven learners enrolled. The co-ordinator intends to increase the number of learners once renovations are completed on the building to which the centre has recently relocated.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings
• This is an effective centre that caters well for the needs of learners.
• Learners are treated respectfully and there is good rapport between staff and learners.
• The quality of teaching and learning observed was good to very good in most lessons with some excellent practice evident.
• Project based learning is a key strength of the centre.
• Literacy and numeracy are well integrated into a number of subject areas.
• The co-ordinator manages the centre well and is very hard working, experienced and committed.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development
• There is a need for intensive continuous professional development (CPD) in teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of a minority of staff.
• The curriculum needs to be broadened and improved to maximise staff resources.
2. THE LEARNERS’ EXPERIENCE

2.1 Attendance/Retention
- Learners’ attendance is good and is significantly better than learners’ attendance in the previous year, 2012.
- There are effective supports in place to facilitate learner attendance, retention and progression. The centre has a sign-in and sign-out system to record attendance which is working well.
- A very good induction programme for learners is in place. However, assessment of learner’s needs and capabilities is too general in nature. There is a need for a more focussed approach to the assessment of learners at the point of entry and subsequently.
- All learners are new to the centre this year and every effort is being made to retain them. This task has been made easier by the provision of the new premises. During the previous year there were significant issues with a very unsatisfactory building that impacted negatively on morale and attendance. Management is commended for addressing the accommodation issue in a timely manner.

2.2 Educational Progression
- Educational progression from the centre is good with the majority of learners from the previous year going on to further education or to employment. Learner progress is celebrated and recognised especially in the local media.
- Learner progression is facilitated by strong links with the local community as local contacts provide opportunities for both work experience and employment.

2.3 Teaching, Learning and Attainment
- Teaching and learning were good to very good in most lessons with excellent practice evident in the Mathematics Art, ICT and Horticulture lessons visited.
- Almost all teachers are good communicators. They were clear and concise in their explanation of key themes and concepts. Poor practice was evident in a minority of lessons observed. More intensive CPD in teaching methodologies and learning strategies is recommended to meet the needs of a minority of staff.
- Learners are treated respectfully and there is good rapport between staff and learners.
- Project based learning is a major strength in this centre. The centre has won a number of environmental and community project awards. A range of collaborative and team working skills is being developed by teachers for learners. This impressive project work is motivational for learners and teachers. Involvement in a number of community-based projects has enhanced both the reputation of the centre and improved the local area. This locally based and relevant project work is highly commended.

2.4 Literacy and Numeracy
- Literacy and numeracy, in particular, are well integrated into teaching and learning in a number of settings but there was scope for development in these areas in some lessons.
2.5 *Life skills*

- The centre caters effectively for the needs of learners. The focus on learners’ life skills and learners’ personal and social development is commendable.
- There is strong focus on the holistic development of learners. Responses to the learner questionnaires that formed part of this evaluation and an interview with learners indicated that students feel well minded, cared for and respected.
- The curriculum offers vocational, social and ICT skills development. Notwithstanding this fact, the curriculum should be broadened to include certified programmes in areas such as music, business, reading and writing initiatives, catering and media studies.
- High quality guidance and counselling is available to learners one day each week. Though new to the centre, learners have already adopted a focussed approach to relevant and realistic career choices. Course planning and delivery should continue to assist learners to explore and achieve their career ambitions.
- The Life Skills programme puts great emphasis on fitness and healthy living. For example, a four week swimming lesson module was underway at the time of the evaluation. Walking is also a curricular activity. However, this needs to become more structured and much more active if it is to make effective use of the time that has been allocated to it. The core Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) element of the Life Skills programme should be made clearer in the planning documentation and the programme delivery.

2.6 *Child protection*

- Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the centre is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

3. CENTRE ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

3.1 *General operation of the centre*

- The centre is well managed. ETB management is very supportive. The experienced Adult Education Officer (AEO) in particular, is a regular visitor and is very supportive. A committed board of management oversees the three Youthreach centres in the county. This arrangement is working well.
- The co-ordinator is very hard working, experienced and committed. He is a leader of teaching and learning in the centre especially in relation to the best interests of learners, care of learners and project-based approaches to teaching and learning.
- The curriculum needs to maximise staff resources bearing in mind that the centre has two new full-time staff members. This is especially true of the curricular provision in the afternoons.
- The centre has engaged fully in both the Quality Framework Initiative (QFI) and Internal Centre Evaluation process (ICE). Short reports emanating from these planning processes have greatly helped the centre to review its work to plan for the future.

3.2 *The centre’s capacity for improvement and development*

- Centre management and most staff have shown a great willingness to adapt and change.
• The recent move to the new premises was managed well and has greatly improved both learner and staff morale. The willingness of the co-ordinator to reflect and learn from reflection was very much in evidence during the evaluation.

• The addition of two staff members who were redeployed from another centre has been a challenge but centre management and staff are working hard to integrate these two new staff members.

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