Evaluation of Centre for Education
REPORT

Ballyfermot Youthreach
Rossmore Avenue
Ballyfermot
Dublin 10.

Date of inspection: 5 March 2010
EVALUATION OF CENTRE OF EDUCATION

This report has been written following an evaluation of Ballyfermot Youthreach. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the work of the centre as a whole and makes recommendations for the further development of the work of the centre. During the evaluation, the inspectors held pre-evaluation meetings with the coordinator of the centre and with the teaching staff. The evaluation was conducted over a number of days during which the inspectors visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspectors interacted with teaching staff and learners in the centre, examined learners’ work and conducted an interview with a representative group of learners. The inspectors also reviewed relevant centre planning documentation and teachers’ and tutors’ written preparation. The inspectors conducted interviews with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Education Officer (EO) of the City of Dublin VEC. Following the evaluation visit, the inspectors provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the EO, the coordinator and staff of the centre. 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.

1 CENTRE CONTEXT AND ETHOS

1.1 Context

Ballyfermot Youthreach, one of thirteen centres under the auspices of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) was established in 1989. The centre was originally housed in Floraville, Sarsfield Road and moved to its current premises on Rossmore Avenue in 1995. This building was formerly a postal sorting office. The Youthreach centre is in an eminently suitable location as it is centrally positioned between the Civic Centre, the Garda Station, the Ballyfermot Partnership office and several local initiatives.

At the time of evaluation, the centre was serving fifty-one learners, thirty-one males and twenty females. Learners come from a wide catchment area including Clondalkin, Palmerstown, Lucan, Crumlin and Ballyfermot. The centre operates the agreed CDVEC continuous enrolment policy which means that learners may join Youthreach at any time of the year. In Ballyfermot Youthreach, for example, seven learners had been attending the centre since 2008, while sixteen learners had joined the centre in February 2010.

1.2 Distinctive character and atmosphere

Ballyfermot Youthreach aims to deliver holistic second chance education in a supportive and safe environment. Its Mission Statement reads: Staff and students at Ballyfermot Youthreach seek to create a safe, creative and educational environment to enable all to develop their full potential through centre programmes. This Mission Statement is concomitant with the general ethos of Youthreach. An attractive, colour brochure highlights the aims and objectives of the centre’s programmes and emphasis is placed on enabling the learners to develop practical, academic, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

Throughout the evaluation process, a calm atmosphere was evident in the centre. There was a strong sense of mutual respect between staff and learners. The co-ordinator and staff are to be commended for their key role in bringing about the positive, inclusive atmosphere observed in the centre.

1.3 Supports for learners
A variety of supports for learners is in place in Ballyfermot Youthreach. The availability of different types of supports to address the educational, vocational and personal needs of the learners is very positive. Central to the personal welfare and social development of the learners is the assignment of a keyworker. Each keyworker meets his/her small group every Friday morning when feedback is given on attendance, participation, behaviour or application. These sessions provide a good opportunity for effective, two-way communication between staff and learners. Reflective learner diaries could usefully be written up at this time to encourage the young people to take ownership of their own progress within the centre. The keyworker system could be further employed to support individual learners with discussion of, inter alia, individual action plans, long-term and short-term goals.

The centre has drawn up a comprehensive Student Personal Development policy and the working through of this policy is aided significantly by the attendance of a FÁS-funded advocate on one day per week. The advocate is a qualified Guidance Counsellor who works with those learners who have been longest in the centre. The individual vocational and training needs of this specific group of learners are assessed with a view to enabling them to progress to further education and employment. Some learners in the centre have registered with FÁS. The advocate has drawn up a helpful document entitled Progression Routes for Ballyfermot Youthreach which reflects the changed economic situation in the area and outlines seven possible progression routes for learners on leaving the centre. In order to ensure that everyone in the centre can access and benefit from ongoing professional guidance, it is recommended that all learners in the centre meet with the FÁS advocate formally on a rotational basis. The role of the Advocate extends to the placement of learners on a two-week work experience programme. While a Preparation for Work module is included in the centre’s timetable, there has been no teacher employed to teach the module since June 2009. This gap in the provision of a key programme on the centre’s timetable needs to be addressed. Meaningful collaboration between a teacher of work preparation programmes in the centre and the FÁS advocate would ensure that learners get an effectively focused service.

CDVEC is commended for making a psychologist available to the centre for a full day once a week. Learners may be referred to the psychologist for individual counselling by the keyworkers and they may also self-refer. This provision of professional support to learners who are experiencing difficulties in their personal lives is a significant aspect of the centre’s pastoral care programme. The psychologist is also on hand to support and advise staff in the appropriate management of learners. A further support for learners is the holding of a fortnightly Care Team meeting which is attended by the psychologist and the teaching staff.

A Learners Council was established in the centre in 2008. It does not, however, have a strong profile and the learners appointed to meet formally with the inspectors during the evaluation were not members of the current Learners Council. The function of a Learners Council is to represent the views of all learners in a formal, structured setting and members of the council can acquire and develop good interpersonal skills which would be of lifelong benefit to them. It would be an opportune time and a worthwhile exercise for staff and learners alike to review the role, value and relevance of the representative council in Ballyfermot Youtheach. The continuing guidance of the co-ordinator, acting as a liaison person or mentor, will be crucial to the success of the Learners’ Council.

The group of six learners who met with the inspectors expressed very supportive views on the centre. They appreciated the friendliness and approachability of the staff and the relaxed atmosphere which was in sharp contrast to their perceived experience of mainstream schools previously attended. One parent met with the inspectors and she too reported positively on her experience of Ballyfermot Youthreach.

On enrolment in the centre the learners’ literacy and numeracy competencies are assessed and recorded. This is good practice. There is, however, no ongoing monitoring of the literacy and numeracy levels attained by the learners over a two-year period in the centre. At the time of evaluation, two
members of staff were availing of an intensive training programme in literacy and numeracy in the CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit. This professional development course was designed specifically for teachers working in Youthreach centres throughout the city. Ballyfermot Youthreach has recently documented some practical ideas and a planned approach to the integration and development of literacy and numeracy as a means of supporting its learners. In order to consolidate the good work being carried out already it is recommended that diagnostic tests be included in assessing the literacy and numeracy aptitudes of new learners. It would be important that a member of staff be provided with appropriate training in the administration of diagnostic tests.

During the month of July, a summer programme is organised with the general aim of broadening the horizons of the learners. Sporting and social events feature strongly in the programme, but there is also provision for practical training such as a Moving and Handling course, work experience placement and the development of life skills.

1.4 Links with the community

Ballyfermot Youthreach draws its learners from a wide number of Dublin suburbs with only twenty-one of the fifty-one learners enrolled coming from Ballyfermot itself. It is the policy of the CDVEC to facilitate open enrolment in all its Youthreach centres. In Ballyfermot, the breadth of intake adds to the vibrancy of the centre but makes it difficult for the centre to be viewed as an integral part of the local community. Steps have been taken, however, to promote links with groups in the locality. The location of the centre is an asset as it is situated close to the Ballyfermot Partnership office, the Garda Station and the Civic Centre. The centre mounted a display stand at the Ballyfermot Partnership Open Day. Guest speakers from local agencies have come to the centre to address the learners. Links with local businesses help to secure placements for work experience. The centre could further improve its local profile and to make its learners more aware of the needs and resources of the area through involvement in some community projects. The energetic and successful Upload Music Festival, organised by the co-ordinator and a team of learners and held in the Autumn of 2009 is a fine example of such positive local participation. The organisation of local events such as the hosting of coffee mornings for senior citizens or the maintenance of the equipment in the playground opposite the centre (in collaboration with local agencies) are possible examples of constructive and affirming projects for the learners.

The centre has limited contact with the local post-primary schools. The strengthening of this contact is recommended. Good cooperation between the post-primary school of a prospective entrant to the Youthreach programme and the management team of the centre would help to identify the specific learning needs of the applicant. It would also facilitate the possibility of learners returning to mainstream education at a later date.

Ballyfermot Youthreach has long established links with the local post Leaving Certificate (PLC) colleges, Kylemore College and Ballyfermot Senior College. Students from these colleges and from Blanchardstown, Waterford and Tralee Institutes of Technology undertake a period of work placement in the centre and they are regarded as very good role models for the learners in Ballyfermot Youthreach.

The Ballyfermot Youthreach Newsletter which, at the time of the evaluation, was at an advanced stage of planning has the potential to enhance the public image and knowledge of the centre. The holding of an Open Day would provide a further opportunity to showcase the good work of the centre.
2 QUALITY OF CENTRE MANAGEMENT

2.1 Role of VEC

The VEC senior management team are au fait with Vocational Support Services Unit (VSSU) procedures and have informed the centre of them. Senior management is cognisant of the VEC responsibilities with regard to the health and safety of the centre and they have ensured that the Youthreach co-ordinator attended a Health and Safety training course. An audit was carried out in Ballyfermot Youthreach and a Health and Safety Statement was drawn up in March 2009.

In common with all other Youthreach centres under the auspices of the CDVEC, Ballyfermot Youthreach does not have a Board of Management. There are no plans to set up a board at present. The Education Officer (EO) and the Regional Co-ordinator assume responsibility for the Youthreach centres and they meet monthly with the co-ordinators. A Coordinators’ Network has been established to support all coordinators working in the CDVEC Youthreach centres, and to give them the opportunity to discuss various aspects of centre management. The submission of an annual report to the CDVEC from Youthreach co-ordinators contributes positively to good communication between the centres and senior management.

CDVEC management promotes and supports the continuous professional development of staff and provides in-service courses for staff members. Senior management liaises with staff members in establishing and planning for their professional needs. Literacy and Numeracy have been earmarked as the most important areas for development over the next three years and it is intended that all Youthreach staff will be upskilled in this field. All staff members need training in the use of the interactive whiteboard which was recently acquired by the centre. CDVEC senior management expressed commitment to the centre’s engagement with the Quality Framework Initiative and the Internal Centre Evaluation (ICE) scheduled to take place in April 2010.

Learners in Ballyfermot Youthreach may avail of the crèche which is funded by the CDVEC and located in the nearby Civic Centre.

2.2 Internal centre management and administration

The co-ordinator has led and managed the centre since 2008. Prior to his appointment to Ballyfermot Youthreach, he had gained valuable experience as co-ordinator of another Youthreach centre in Co. Wicklow. He has already brought about changes in Ballyfermot and, as he has the support and confidence of his staff, he is well placed to implement further positive changes in the centre. Good co-operation and teamwork among all personnel in the centre was observed during the evaluation and this was seen to contribute to the effective running of the centre. Fortnightly staff meetings are held and are attended by all staff members including the centre’s administrator.

The centre has an efficient administrative support system as a full time administrator is employed to carry out secretarial work, reception duties, the taking and maintenance of staff meeting minutes, and the processing of weekly payments to learners.

2.3 Organisation of the curriculum

Mathematics, English or Communications, Art, Catering, Personal & Interpersonal Skills, ICT and a work-related module are commendably included in the timetabled provision for all the centre’s programmes. Health education forms part of a number of modules such Health Related Fitness, Catering,
Caring for Children and Outdoor Pursuits. Given the importance of health education it is recommended that Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) be included in the centre’s programme.

In Ballyfermot Youthreach, the learners are divided into five separate groups for class. As there are 51 learners in the centre, many of whom attend inconsistently, it is suggested that a division into four groups would be a more efficient use of staffing resources while still keeping numbers relatively small. During the course of the evaluation, the number of learners in each class group ranged from three to ten, the latter occurring when two groups were merged for a Woodwork lesson.

The need to achieve a balance between a structured environment for the learners and flexibility around timetabling is recognised. Ballyfermot Youthreach operates an alternate weekly timetable. However, there are difficulties, in practice, around the implementation of the timetable. As a result of absenteeism, it is often necessary to merge two class groups into one. Since these are ad hoc arrangements, learners and staff rarely have advance notice so their actual daily timetable can vary greatly from the centre’s official timetable. This situation is unsatisfactory in the medium to long term and the centre needs to address the issue of viable class numbers, individual learning plans, purposeful team teaching and the efficient deployment of staff.

It was noted that all lesson periods are of a minimum 90 minutes duration. This time allocation is suited to practical subjects such as Woodwork, Catering and Art but it is far too long for non-practical subjects.

The Outdoor Pursuits programme includes hill walking, rock climbing and orienteering and abseiling. Each group of learners is timetabled for a full day’s Outdoor Pursuits (usually in the Dublin or Wicklow mountains) every second week. On Monday afternoons, male learners play indoor football and all learners, male and female, participate in Health Related Fitness on Friday mornings. A review is required of the time allocated to sports and outdoor pursuits. While recognising the physical and mental benefits of sport and activity for young people, it is questionable whether, out of the four and a half days that learners attend the centre, two full days should be devoted to sport every second week. This issue is further complicated by the unavailability of the shared minibus on some of the days on which Outdoor Pursuits are timetabled. In the context of a full review of all the programmes/modules on offer in Ballyfermot, it is recommended that other types of trips and outings be considered for learners such as visits to the cinema, interpretative centres, art exhibitions, museums and historic buildings, training centres and colleges in order to broaden their educational experiences.

Two significant areas of curricular underprovision were noted during the evaluation. For staff-related reasons, no Information and Communications and Technology (ICT) lessons had been provided since December 2009 and, as previously stated in paragraph 1.3, the Preparation for Work module, although on the timetable, was not being delivered in the centre.

Certification is offered to learners at FETAC level 3 and FETAC level 4, but a refinement of structures is needed here. In the centre, thirty seven learners are registered for FETAC level 4 accreditation while fourteen learners are registered for FETAC level 3. Both levels are taught simultaneously in most subject areas. However, with the exception of Mathematics, no differentiation was noted in the various lessons observed. If resources permit, it may be more effective to place learners in discrete FETAC level 3 and FETAC level 4 groups where coursework could be more focused and more tailored to the ability level of the group. This should lead to better outcomes for all learners.

Programme delivery would benefit from structured forward planning. There is a pressing need for the staff team to meet regularly and purposefully to discuss the programmes on offer, their suitability to the learners and their fit with the aims and objectives of the centre. Co-ordination and collaboration is required to avoid repetition and overlap between modules. Consideration should be given to introducing a
number of other FETAC programmes which would have the capacity to challenge and motivate learners, but which could be delivered by existing staff members. A greater choice of FETAC modules, together with other educational non-accredited courses would broaden the educational experience of learners, particularly the more able learners.

The irregular attendance pattern of many of the learners was noted during the evaluation. Samples of attendance data were taken and these showed, for example, that in October 2009, only three learners out of a total of fifty one learners enrolled had full (20 days) attendance. In November 2009, five learners were registered as having full attendance. Ongoing poor attendance impacts negatively on both learners and teachers and strategies to substantially improve this situation should be a management priority.

2.4 Management of staff

Ballyfermot Youthreach centre is staffed by a full-time co-ordinator, two full-time resource persons, one part-time resource person, seven part-time teaching staff, an administrator and two ancillary staff. The co-ordinator oversees all planning, managerial, disciplinary and curricular matters. He does not undertake teaching duties apart from the delivery of Drama workshops in the summer programme. The length of service among the staff represents a good blend of relatively recent appointments and longer serving members. All staff members play a significant role in the pastoral care of the learners and collectively they provide a secure, caring environment for the learners.

2.5 Management of accommodation and other resources

The Ballyfermot Youthreach building is, overall, suitable for its purpose. It is clean and well maintained. The grim, industrial appearance of the exterior belies the bright, well lit, comfortable interior. The front office, where an interesting metal sculpture made by the learners in 2008 is displayed, is well positioned to receive visitors. Despite the fact that the corridors are narrow and that some rooms have no windows, the classrooms are warm and stimulating with ample posters and numerous photographs on display. The specialist ICT room is equipped with 20 computers and there is also a laptop and a printer in each classroom. Due to the absence of the ICT teacher, the computer room was not in use and there was no broadband connection available during the evaluation. The woodwork room is large and the tools in use are top of the range. There is a need however for a better method of dust extraction in this room.

The location of the new interactive whiteboard in a teacher-based classroom might be reviewed in order to make it more accessible to all staff and learners. Sofas are provided in some classrooms, but it is difficult to say if such comfortable seating is conducive to focused learning. These sofas might be better placed in a new social area for learners. Presently, learners have no common area for social interaction and although there is a vending machine for cold drinks and snacks, no hot food or refreshments of any substance are provided for learners. This is at variance with the practice in most Youthreach centres around the country. Ideally, a hot meal or soup and sandwiches should be provided at lunchtime. Learners could be involved in the preparation of lunch, on a rotational basis. The centre has a very spacious, well-equipped kitchen which is used for practical lessons in Fast Food Catering on Mondays and on Wednesday mornings when the Catering teacher is on the premises. Apart from the daily assembly of all learners at nine o’clock, the kitchen, the appliances and the equipment are lying idle for the remainder of the week. This is a waste of an excellent resource. Under the supervision of a member of staff, it should be possible for learners to access the kitchen at lunchtime.

The availability of a comfortable social area – in the lower section of the large kitchen, for example - would be an incentive to learners to spend their lunchtime on the premises. It would enhance the atmosphere of the centre, allowing staff and learners to socialise together and, in addition, learners would imperceptibly improve their literacy and numeracy skills through informal, enjoyable lunchtime activities.
When the FAS advocate and the Counsellor visit the centre, the co-ordinator must vacate his office to facilitate their advice sessions. A small separate space is needed to accommodate this type of work and this space could also be used for other work with individual students.

3 QUALITY OF CENTRE PLANNING

3.1 Centre plan and policies

Ballyfermot Youthreach has been engaging with the Quality Framework Initiative (QFI) since late 2007. The aim of the QFI is to develop and implement a quality assurance model that should lead to ongoing improvement in the service offered by Youthreach centres, taking the specific needs of each centre into account. This planning process involves a series of internal centre evaluations and the assessment of twenty-seven quality areas, resulting in the documentation of a centre development plan (CDP). In January 2008 the Centre Development Plan was drawn up by the staff of Ballyfermot Youthreach and the agreed Mission Statement was developed. As recommended by the QFI, twelve areas of action were identified to be completed by the end of July 2008.

The centre has a wide range of policies in place, some of which are centre specific and the majority of which are applicable to all CDVEC centres for education. These policies support the implementation of best practice in the Youthreach centre. Throughout 2009, a number of policies, including the centre’s code of behaviour, were reviewed, signed and dated and this is very good practice.

The issue of child protection was discussed with the VEC and the management of the centre. Evidence was provided to confirm that the VEC has taken appropriate steps to develop a child protection policy in line with the provisions in Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Health and Children, 1999). Evidence was also provided to confirm that the board of management of the centre has formally adopted the VEC child policy and procedures. Confirmation was provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of centre management, centre staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all centre staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) has been appointed in line with the requirements of these Department of Health and Children guidelines. A deputy DLP has also been appointed in the event of the absence of the DLP.

3.2 Planning process

As part of the centre development process, all staff, under the guidance of an external facilitator, participated in a Main Centre Review and an analysis of the strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats (SCOT) of the centre in November 2006. There have been a number of changes in the composition of the staff since then, including the appointment of a new co-ordinator. Accordingly, the Centre Development Plan, drawn up in 2008 is in the process of being reviewed and updated to reflect changes and developments since then.

3.3 Implementation of plan

Staff members participated in an internal centre evaluation (ICE) in April 2009. No documentation relating to decisions taken in 2009 was available so it is unclear which areas were earmarked for attention as a result of that particular internal evaluation. A further ICE day was scheduled to take place on 27 April 2010 when staff were due to review the Centre Development Plan and prioritise areas for future development, under the guidance of a QFI facilitator. One of the challenges facing the centre in terms of
future whole-centre planning is the need to review collaboratively the range and the effectiveness of the programmes on offer and how to achieve the optimum engagement and motivation of the learners.

4 QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

4.1 Planning and preparation

The level of planning and preparation for individual lessons varied. Quality lesson planning was observed in some curricular areas where teachers had clear, well structured lesson plans and schemes of work. In some cases, the aims and objectives of the lesson were outlined to the learners at the outset. This is good practice. Some lesson planning, however, was guided solely by FETAC programme descriptors which resulted in a repetitive lesson and a very slow pace of work. Planning for effective teaching and learning should be guided first and foremost by the specific needs of the learners in the group. The development of individual learning plans, taking account of the literacy levels and the varying abilities of the learners would enable teachers to deliver a more effective and learner-focused programme. A number of teachers did not present any planning documentation other than an outline of the lesson being observed on the day.

4.2 Classroom management and teaching methods

In the course of the evaluation, it was clear that a positive and relaxed atmosphere prevailed in the classrooms. Class groups were small and in the majority of lessons there was a mutually respectful rapport between teachers and learners. In some of the lessons observed, there was very good interaction, with learners reading aloud and contributing to class discussion. A small number of learners were reluctant to participate but most were able to express their opinions in a responsible and articulate way. This was particularly evident in the Personal Development and Childcare lessons where teachers were skilful in eliciting mature, assertive responses from learners. Teachers of all subjects were seen to affirm and encourage the learners.

In a Communications class, the teacher engaged the learners’ interests by linking past and present events. An article on the Irish famine of the 1840s was read aloud and discussed. Learners were asked to complete the accompanying written comprehension questions, a task that the majority of the group was able to accomplish with little or no difficulty. The well known song The Fields of Athenry was played to illustrate, in an accessible way, the hardship of the time. Finally the discussion moved to a present-day disaster, i.e. the earthquake in Haiti.

In another Communications class, the intriguing story of the Bermuda Triangle was the chosen topic. A short article, accompanied by a map showing the location of the virtual triangle engaged the learners. This was good productive use of visual stimuli. Some learners volunteered to read aloud and did so ably. The teacher gave clear instructions on how to answer the comprehension questions and learners received individual help with spellings when required.

Excellent teaching practice was observed in a Mathematics lesson. The enthusiasm and creativity of the teacher were central to the effective teaching and learning observed. Colourful maths charts and posters created a stimulating learning environment in what was formerly a pool room. Learners had a customised, laminated booklet that allowed each individual to progress at his or her own pace. All materials had been prepared by the teacher to respond to the specific learning needs of individual learners and as a result, the levels of participation and engagement on the part of learners were very high.

The teaching of the practical subjects of Woodwork and Fast Food Catering was such as to effectively engage and interest the learners. It was clear that the lessons were well planned, that materials had been
prepared in advance and that the learners were thoroughly versed in safety measures and in food hygiene practices. The teachers interacted well with the learners who were busy and occupied throughout the lessons.

In many lessons, the teaching and learning resources used consisted solely of photocopied articles and work sheets. The introduction of a wider range of resources would bring learners into fruitful contact with more colourful, stimulating materials. Over time, a collection of appropriate books, magazines, puzzles, games, photographs and DVDs could be acquired which could be used by all staff and learners.

4.3 Assessment of learners’ progress

Teachers used a variety of assessment techniques to monitor the academic progress of the learners. These included observation, discussion, questioning, and the recording of attendance. In one class, the extent of each learner’s participation and application was recorded and this is very good practice.

The centre has drawn up a literacy plan and the testing of all learners on entry is noted as a worthwhile exercise. However, no information regarding the literacy and numeracy levels of individual learners was provided on the Learner Profile Data forms submitted to the inspectors in advance of the evaluation. It is important that careful records of the assessment of the literacy and numeracy standards of all learners be maintained. The results of such literacy tests should be used to inform the assignment of learners to a particular group. While recognising the value of literacy testing on enrolment, the ongoing assessment of the learners’ literacy levels, coupled with intensive programmes to address any shortcomings, is crucial to the progress and attainment of learners.

Learners are required to complete key assignments, present portfolios and perform specific tasks as part of the FETAC coursework. The work is assessed externally in order to gain the FETAC accreditation. In some curricular areas, substantial numbers of learners have successfully attained external accreditation. In other curricular areas, more robust efforts are required of teachers and learners to prepare and present work for FETAC external accreditation within a specific timeframe.

Two initiatives, the introduction of an annual awards night for learners and the issuing of written progress reports twice a year to parents/guardians were under consideration at the time of evaluation. Both initiatives would enhance communications between the centre and learners’ families.

4.4 Outcomes and standards

The achievement of an appropriate balance between provision for personal and social development on the one hand, and support in achieving certification and progression on the other, is an important task for Youthreach centres. In Ballyfermot Youthreach, career guidance provision has helped learners to identify the different opportunities open to them. The centre needs to develop a tracking system to monitor the destination of its learners, thirty seven of whom left the Youthreach programme between January and June 2009.

It was clear that learners were experiencing a growth in confidence and self-esteem and that the centre was successfully providing opportunities for learners to re-engage with education and training and to acquire important life skills.
5. SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The co-ordinator and staff in Ballyfermot Youthreach are committed to providing an inclusive, safe, encouraging environment for learners.
- The interior of the centre is comfortable, warm and well maintained.
- Effective links have been established with some local initiatives and these links could be strengthened through greater participation in community projects.
- The educational, social and personal needs of learners are supported through a wide range of measures and interventions.
- A Learners Council has been established but it needs to be given a higher profile and role in the centre.
- There is a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration among the staff and the centre has an efficient administrative system in place.
- Effective teaching and learning was observed in most lessons and a positive and supportive rapport between staff and learners was noted.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- Accurate records of the literacy levels of learners on enrolment need to be kept and the systematic assessment of literacy levels should be carried out.
- The programmes on offer, the grouping of learners and the timetabling arrangements need to be reviewed.
- The absence of the ICT and Preparation for Work programmes, two essential components of Youthreach curriculum, needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- Basic hot food should be prepared and consumed by the learners on the premises at lunchtime.
- A re-organisation of the spacious kitchen would provide a dining and socialising area for learners.
- The acquisition of books, magazines and other reading materials would help to improve literacy levels and promote the habit of reading.
- Learners should be encouraged and enabled to strive for accreditation at the appropriate FETAC level in as many subject areas as possible.
- The tracking of learner destinations when they leave Ballyfermot Youthreach would inform policy and practice in the centre.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the co-ordinator, the Education Officer of CDVEC and the staff of the centre at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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