EVALUATION of CENTRES FOR EDUCATION
2014

REPORT

Longford Youthreach Centre,
The Battery Road,
Longford

YR0063

Date of evaluation: 19 November 2014
EVALUATION OF CENTRES OF EDUCATION

Introduction
A focussed evaluation of Longford Youthreach Centre was undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in November 2014. 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, Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) chief executive and education officer, and the chairperson of the centre’s board of management. The evaluation also involved a 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, and ETB management the co-ordinator. 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.

Longford Youthreach Centre relocated from Granard to Longford town in August 2014. Over a thirteen-year period, the centre catered very successfully for the needs of learners in Granard, and fostered strong links with its community. A decision was taken by the LWETB earlier this year to move to Longford where the greatest demand for the service exists. The centre is one of four managed by the LWETB, and has twenty-five learners enrolled. It caters for a diverse learner population, including learners from a Traveller background, and another significant cohort who have English as an additional language. There are seven members of staff.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings
- Staff members work professionally and collaboratively to create a respectful, inclusive and effective learning environment in which the learners’ social and personal development is fostered.
- The experienced and committed co-ordinator provides very good leadership to learners and staff.
- The quality of teaching and learning is commendable, with some very good teaching practices observed.
- The building is one of the centre’s significant strengths. It is fit for purpose and very well resourced.
- The chief executive officer and the education officer of LWETB take a proactive approach to supporting and managing the centre.
- The transition of the centre from Granard to Longford town, and the changeover from the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme to Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) certification, is being very well managed.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development
- An academic, vocational and personal profiling system should be developed for learners.
- A phased approach to the introduction of more practical, vocational and skills-based modules is recommended.
- In order to build on emerging good practice in relation to schemes of work, a consistent approach should be adopted to include planning for methodologies, learning outcomes and action towards improvement across the centre.
2. THE LEARNERS’ EXPERIENCE

2.1 Attendance/Retention
• Learner attendance is very good, and it is carefully monitored and recorded. In accordance with its mission statement the safe, caring and respectful atmosphere created by all staff, facilitates learner attendance.

2.2 Educational Progression
• Educational progression from the centre is good for some learners in terms of going onto further education. Very strong links were forged between the centre and businesses in the locality in Granard, and a good start has been made in forging similar links in Longford town. There is limited access to career guidance. It is recommended that learners be provided with career guidance on a regular basis and from an early stage in the centre.

2.3 Teaching, Learning and Attainment
• The quality of teaching and learning is commendable, with some very effective practice observed.
• The teachers are good communicators, explain concepts clearly, and create very orderly learning environments. A very high number of learners surveyed as part of the evaluation enjoy going to classes, and a significant number of parents surveyed agree that teaching is good in the centre.
• Best practice observed involved the use of effective learning methodologies, including pair work, role-play, use of digital media and use of the environment. These methodologies should be adopted in all settings across the centre.
• High quality tuition and participation in the arts and sporting programmes motivates and engages learners.
• Plans for developing the information and communications technology (ICT) facilities are underway, but these need to be finalised as a matter of priority in order to support the development of the learners’ ICT skills.
• The centre is in transition from offering the LCA programme to certification in a variety of modules under the QQI. This change is being managed very successfully, and staff are commended on their flexibility and commitment to facilitating the process.
• Modules such as health and fitness, food and nutrition, art, communications and Mathematics support the development of the learners’ life skills. To complement this programme, a phased approach to the introduction of more practical, vocational and skills-based modules is recommended.
• Learners are assessed upon entry. To build on this initial assessment, it is recommend that an academic, vocational and personal profiling system be developed to complement the initial assessment.

2.4 Literacy and Numeracy
• The teaching of numeracy is effective, while aspects of communications show scope for development. The QQI modules for communications and numeracy are systematically delivered to learners. Successful numeracy lessons observed incorporated competent teacher instruction and well-managed learning activities. Greater emphasis should now be placed on the application of mathematical concepts to real-life contexts. In
communications, greater opportunities need to be afforded to learners to read a variety of texts and to develop their oral presentation skills. A programme of continuous professional development (CPD) should be put in place for the staff to address these areas in literacy and numeracy.

- Timetabling of literacy and numeracy is very well organised, enabling learners access to literacy and numeracy lessons daily.

2.5 Life skills

- There is a strong focus on the development of the learners’ personal and social skills. The management of behaviour and attitudes is of a very high standard. Staff provide an effective mentoring programme for learners. A counselling service is available in the centre.
- Regular recreational and sporting trips within Ireland and abroad widen the experiences of learners.
- Work experience placements are provided in July in a wide range of businesses within the Longford area.

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 school 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 Chief Executive and Education Officer of LWETB take a proactive approach to supporting and managing the centre.
- The quality of the building is of a very high standard, and offers further potential to develop facilities to support modules in craft and catering.
- The experienced co-ordinator provides very good leadership to learners and staff. He empowers staff to take on new challenges, is deeply committed to the welfare of the learners, and displays highly developed organisational and management skills. All parents surveyed agree that the centre is well run and are happy with the centre.
- The board of management provides valuable support to the centre.
- Voluntary and work placement personnel lead the learners in preparing good quality meals.
- A wide range of policies is devised in consultation with the ETB, staff and parents. These policies successfully contribute to the smooth operation of the centre. There is a need to review the enrolment policy to ensure it sets out clear procedures in cases where demand exceeds available places.
- Some good schemes of work are prepared by individual tutors, incorporating learning objectives, methodologies and actions towards improvements. It is recommended that this practice be adopted by all members of staff.
3.2 The centre’s capacity for improvement and development

- This is an effective centre, and there is a willingness and openness to work towards improvement. The experience gained by the co-ordinator and staff in successfully leading Granard Youthreach centre will contribute significantly to establishing Longford Youthreach centre.