An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

EVALUATION of CENTRES FOR EDUCATION
2013

REPORT

Youthreach Edenderry,
St. Mary’s Road,
Edenderry, Co.Offaly

Date of evaluation: 11 October 2013
EVALUATION OF CENTRES OF EDUCATION

Introduction
A focussed evaluation of Youthreach Edenderry 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 resource persons, staff, board members, Education and Training Board (ETB) management and the former co-ordinator.

Twenty-one learners attend the centre which is situated in Edenderry town. The well-resourced and fit-for-purpose building shares its campus with the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI). Eight tutors on staff work on a part-time basis in addition to two resource persons who work in a job-sharing capacity. Plans are underway to appoint a new co-ordinator following the transfer of the previous co-ordinator to another role. The centre serves learners from Edenderry and a wide rural catchment area.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings
- ETB management provide very good supports to the centre.
- The building, which is owned by the ETB, is very well resourced and fit-for-purpose.
- The quality of internal centre evaluation (ICE), centre planning and staff planning is commendable.
- Staff members create very orderly learning environments and lessons are characterised by positive and caring interactions between learners and teachers.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development
- It is recommended that centre management devise, implement and monitor an action plan to address learner absenteeism in the centre.
- Teachers should utilise more active-learning methodologies as a means of raising the participation levels of all learners in the more academic and social skills subject areas.
- It is recommended that literacy and numeracy education be prioritised for further development.

2. THE LEARNERS’ EXPERIENCE

2.1 Attendance/Retention
- There is scope for development in learner attendance. A significant number of learners are absent on a daily basis. The centre has a system for recording daily attendance and explanations for learner absenteeism are also maintained. It is recommended that centre management analyse this data to inform the development and implementation of an action plan to improve learner attendance. This action plan should include specific and measurable targets for improvement which are supported by a range of suitable attendance strategies. Centre management should monitor and review this plan at regular intervals.
**Educational Progression**

- Provision for educational progression is good.
- An induction programme is in place for new learners. They are provided with a user-friendly handbook outlining the centre’s mission, procedures and rules. Initial assessments are carried out on each learner in the areas of literacy, numeracy and social skills.
- The centre offers Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) certification at levels three and four across a range of academic and life skills areas.
- Very effective systems are in place to track the progression of learners. This is facilitated by the Career’s Guidance Counsellor and ETB management. Thirty-seven percent of learners who left the centre in 2013 have either commenced further education training courses or are on training course waiting lists. Given the context of current economic difficulties nationally and locally it is positive to note that approximately eighteen percent of learners are in full-time or part-time employment following work experience organised by the centre.
- It is commendable that centre management and BTEI share resources to enable some learners to achieve FETAC level five on site.
- Responses to learner questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation indicate that a very high number of learners believe they get good advice and information from tutors about subjects and career options.

2.2 **Teaching, Learning and Attainment**

- The quality of teaching, learning and attainment is good with some very good practice observed in craft-based learning.
- The teachers are good communicators and explain things clearly. A significant number of learners surveyed concur with this statement while all parents agree that teaching is good in the centre. Teachers utilise a good variety of resources and create very orderly learning environments. Lessons are characterised by very positive and caring interactions between learners and staff members.
- Good quality long-term and short-term plans are evident in each setting incorporating clear learning outcomes for learners.
- In most lessons learners complete appropriate activities and participate successfully in learning tasks. In a number of other lessons, there are some learners who do not participate to a satisfactory level in learning activities. It is recommended that teachers utilise a wider variety of active-learning methodologies as a means of raising the participation levels of all learners in the academic and social skills subject areas.
- The centre has designed a good framework for Individual Learning Plans. These plans include educational achievements to date and general goals for the year. To add impetus to this effective practice, it is recommended that learning plans include more specific and measurable goals in relation to the learners’ educational, communication and vocational development. These plans should be monitored closely by tutors.

2.3 **Literacy and Numeracy**

- A literacy plan which includes some strategies for its implementation has been devised. The display and exploration of key vocabulary associated with each subject area is
centrally implemented by all teachers. This practice is praiseworthy. Some satisfactory samples of writing were noted in learners’ portfolios. Notwithstanding this, there is scope to develop the integration and implementation of literacy and numeracy across the subjects offered in the centre.

- It is recommended that literacy and numeracy education be prioritised as areas for development, and continuous professional development be provided for all staff. The role of the co-ordinator and resource person will be central to the development, implementation and monitoring of these plans.

- Currently, mathematics and communications teaching comprises one hour and forty-five minutes each on a weekly basis. This should be reviewed to provide more opportunities to practise and consolidate learning.

2.4 Life skills

- In general, the focus on the development of the learners’ life skills is commendable. The curriculum offers well-structured programmes in practical, vocational, information and communications technology and life skills, including work experience opportunities.

- The summer programme enables the learners to experience a range of cultural, historical and sporting experiences.

- Guidance and counselling is made available to learners.

- A considerable amount of resources are devoted to the delivery of three separate programmes in the areas of social and personal development. It is recommended that the components of the life skills, social personal and health education (SPHE) and personal and interpersonal skills (PIPS) modules are examined to avoid undue overlap.

2.5 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

- ETB management and the board of management provide very good supports to the centre in terms of resources, policy development, quality assurance and staff training.

- The centre has benefited from the efforts of the hard-working co-ordinator who was in place for the past ten years. She capably led centre planning and placed great emphasis on building relationship between learners and their parents.

- The acting co-ordinator has fulfilled her duties capably.

- All parents surveyed agree or strongly agree that the centre is well run and know who to go to if they have a problem. All teachers indicated that they feel confident they would get support from centre management if their assistance was required.
3.2 The centre’s capacity for improvement and development

- The quality of centre planning is good. A wide range of policies and procedures has been devised and reviewed over the past number of years in consultation with ETB management and staff.
- The centre is commended for engaging in ICE and all teachers surveyed indicate they find this process beneficial to their work.
- Overall, the centre is effective and the staff demonstrate a willingness and openness to work towards improvement.

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.