An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

EVALUATION of CENTRES FOR EDUCATION
2013

REPORT

Arklow Youth Reach
Arklow, Co. Wicklow

Date of evaluation: 14 October 2013
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Introduction

A focussed evaluation of Arklow Youthreach 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, the resource persons, staff, and the Kildare Wicklow Education Training Board (KWETB) adult education officer. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Arklow Youthreach is one of four Youthreach centres in County Wicklow under the management of KWETB. It commenced in 1987 and currently thirty-five learners are enrolled.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The quality of centre management is good.
- An atmosphere of care and respect for learners is evident in the centre.
- The retention rate for students is variable.
- The percentage of learners who receive full certification varies from year-to-year.
- The educational profiling of learners is not sufficiently developed.
- The quality of teaching ranged from very good to lessons in which there was significant scope for improvement.
- The most effective teaching observed included very clear lesson planning, the stating of learning objectives from the outset, appropriate pacing and good monitoring of student’s work.
- Planning for learning was generally of a very good quality.
- Good literacy and numeracy teaching strategies were only observed in a few lessons.
- The centre is currently not compliant with Circular FE12/2003 with regard to the provision of learner tuition time.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- Strategies to improve the retention rate of learners should be deployed within the centre.
- Comprehensive Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) for learners should be fully developed.
• The use of differentiated teaching, co-operative and explorative learning and assessment for learning techniques should be maximised in all learning activities.
• The centre’s staff should identify practical measures to further develop learners’ literacy and numeracy skills.
• The opportunities to further enhance learners’ life skills through greater use of the centre’s facilities and the summer programme should be fully exploited.
• Circular FE12/2003 should be fully complied with.

2. THE LEARNERS’ EXPERIENCE

2.1 Attendance/Retention
• A safe and caring atmosphere has been established in the centre. There are good systems in place for contacting absent learners.
• The retention rate of students in the centre varies from year to year. The reasons why some learners choose not to continue with their participation should be fully explored by centre management and strategies to effect improvement should be put in place.

2.2 Educational Progression
• The week long learner induction process is positive as it allows students to become familiar with the centre and its operation. The fact that learners are only in the centre for the first half of the day during this week impacts on tuition time.
• Timetabling arrangements should be reviewed to ensure compliance with Circular FE12/2003 regarding contact time with the learners.
• Currently learners have the opportunity to complete FETAC accredited modules. The percentage of learners who receive full certification varies from year-to-year.
• Learners can achieve additional learning experiences through participation in the Gaisce awards, the Young Social Innovator (YSI) programme and summer programme activities. The centre is a health promotion centre and provides a good sports timetabled programme.
• The development of comprehensive individual learning plans (ILPs) for learners should be prioritised. Each learner’s plan should contain all relevant social, educational, career and personal information. In addition, an action plan that charts the learner’s educational aspirations and progress should be maintained.
• A system of learner mentoring has been re-established in the centre and relevant feedback from mentoring sessions should also be recorded in students’ ILPs.
• The centre benefits from an additional hour allocation under the Special Educational Needs Initiative.
2.3 Teaching, Learning and Attainment

- The quality of teaching ranged from very good to lessons in which there was significant scope for further development. The most effective teaching observed included very clear lesson planning, the stating of learning objectives from the outset, appropriate pacing and good monitoring of student’s work.
- Very good student support was a feature of most lessons. An atmosphere of mutual respect was observed between tutors and learners. The behaviour of learners throughout the centre was very good.
- To further enhance and challenge students’ learning, the use of differentiated teaching techniques, co-operative and explorative learning and assessment for learning techniques should be maximised in all learning activities.
- There is a high quality provision of information and communication technology (ICT) in the centre and it was well used by some tutors and learners. However, in some specialised computer classrooms there are no whiteboards and this should be remedied.
- The quality of the yearly plans for the delivery of FETAC modules is of a very high standard for most modules. Short-term planning for lessons was very good in most lessons.
- The development of team-teaching and small group teaching should be explored so as to maximise the use of teaching resources.
- Current space restrictions in the centre prevent the allocation of teacher-based classrooms and as a result the potential to develop visual learning environments is diminished. The development of subject-based rooms and subject-based notice boards should be considered as an interim measure.

2.4 Literacy and Numeracy

- Good practice in relation to developing learners’ literacy and numeracy skills was only observed in a few lessons.
- The literacy and numeracy policy requires additional information regarding appropriate teaching strategies that could be used in lessons and throughout the centre.

2.5 Life skills

- There is a focus on the holistic development of the learner including personal and social development. Learners’ achievement in the YSI is praiseworthy.
- While learners can partake in activities such as trips, first aid and music generation courses during the summer programme, they noted that there were days in which there were no formal activities. The summer programme should be reviewed to ensure full engagement of all learners as well as provide additional opportunities for certification.
• Guidance, counselling and work experience opportunities are made available to the learners through the facilitation of tutors, the advocate and external agencies.

• The opportunity to further enhance the life skills of the learners through greater use of the well equipped kitchen and dining facilities should be fully exploited.

• The re-establishment of learner council is a positive development. The opportunities to involve the learners’ council further in the life of the centre should be maximised.

2.6 Child protection

• Arklow Youthreach has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (DES, 2011). The centre has a child protection policy and procedures in line with Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Health, 2011). While the names of the designated liaison person (DLP) and deputy DLP are displayed in the centre they should be placed at a more prominent place near the entrance.

3. CENTRE ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

3.1 General operation of the centre

• The centre is bright, well maintained and enables a good learning environment. Learners and parents expressed pride in the centre.

• Management and administrative roles are clearly defined and the work of the co-ordinator and resource team was observed to be caring and supportive of learner’s needs.

• Centre management are actively involved in creating and developing links with the local community and organisations.

3.2 The centre’s capacity for improvement and development

• The centre has engaged in quality assurance procedures and has identified areas for further development through the internal centre evaluation process. The views of parents should also be formally sought and included in the evaluation process.

• The centre is well supported by KWETB. The ETB should consider the establishment of a board of management for the centre in line with best practice guidelines.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

KWETB welcomes the positive and affirmative Evaluation of Centres of Education report. KWETB in particular welcomes the findings that:

- The quality of centre management is good.
- An atmosphere of care and respect for learners is evident in the centre.
- Learners and parents expressed pride in the centre.
- Management and administrative roles are clearly defined and the work of the co-ordinator and the resource team was observed to be caring and supportive of learner’s needs.
- The most effective teaching observed included very clear lesson planning, the stating of learning objectives from the outset, appropriate pacing and good monitoring of student’s work.
- Planning for learning was generally of a very good quality.
- The quality of the yearly plans for the delivery of FETAC modules is of a very high standard in most modules.
- The focus on the holistic development of the learner including personal and social development.
- The centre is bright, well maintained and enables a good learning environment.
- Centre management are actively involved in creating and developing links with the local community and organisations.
- Learners can achieve additional learning experiences through participation in the Gaisce awards, the Young Social Innovator (YSI) programme and summer programme activities.
  The learners’ achievement in the YSI was praiseworthy.
- The centre is a health promotion centre and provides a good sports timetabled programme

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

KWETB is committed to use the recommendations of the evaluation report to identify areas for further improvement.

- A daily tracking and support mechanism has been put in place for students who are experiencing difficulties. A myriad of home and external factors contribute to students who leave before completing the programme.
- The induction process will be reviewed in consultation with the main stakeholders.
- Individual Learning Plans are being reviewed and further developed. This process will include consultation with colleagues both internal and external to KWETB.
- KWETB is committed to support staff in the area of CPD. The on-going development of learning will be implemented and monitored throughout the programme.
- Literacy and numeracy will be further embedded in all programmes with a review and monitoring of all programme plans.
- Programme plans will encompass a variety of different learning styles.
- The summer programme will focus on the area of life skills.
- Curriculum review is on-going but a review of the annual timetable will take place to include life skills with a specific emphasis on cooking.
- KWETB will review its compliance with FE12/2003.