EVALUATION of CENTRES FOR EDUCATION
2014

REPORT

Dungarvan Youthreach
Dungarvan, Co. Waterford
YR0085

Date of evaluation: 7 March 2014
EVALUATION OF CENTRES OF EDUCATION

Introduction
A focussed evaluation of Youthreach Dungarvan was undertaken by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in March 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, 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, parents and Waterford Wexford Education Training Board (WWETB) senior management. Following the evaluation, a meeting to discuss the findings was held with the centre co-ordinator, the resource persons, staff, board members and the WWETB management.

Youthreach Dungarvan is a 27 place centre established in 1997 to provide second chance education for early school leavers. It moved to a new purpose built premises in 2009 and is co-located with regional youth services. 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. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The centre is very well organised and run by a committed and experienced co-ordinator who brings very good leadership skills to the role.
- The work of the co-ordinator is ably and effectively supported by the management team and staff.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good across all subjects with some scope for development in a small number of areas.
- There is a safe and supportive environment in the centre which facilitates and encourages attendance and retention.
- There is a whole centre approach to the varied and challenging needs of the learners and life skills are addressed through a range of practical subjects and initiatives.
- Centre development planning which incorporates action planning is well established.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- Agreed strategies should be implemented in all lessons to advance literacy and numeracy development.
- Possibilities regarding access to additional space for the centre should be pursued as a priority.
- The centre timetable should be reviewed with regard to allocation of double periods to non-practical subjects.
- A wide range of teaching methodologies should be employed in all lessons.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) should be extended to all lessons.
2. THE LEARNERS’ EXPERIENCE

2.1 Attendance/Retention

- There is a safe, caring and supportive environment in the centre which facilitates and encourages attendance and retention. There are many positive strategies in place to encourage good attendance. However, the varied challenges that some learners face in their personal lives mean that attendance and retention are on-going challenges.

- There are effective systems in place to record learner attendance. It would be worthwhile exploiting the centre’s behaviour points system more effectively in order to reward punctuality and good attendance.

2.2 Educational Progression

- An effective induction programme is in place for learners and this is revisited during the year if new learners join the centre. Learners are assessed on enrolment in terms of personal, social, emotional and special education needs.

- A balanced curriculum is in place which is kept under review and which allows for educational progression and certification.

- The centre has developed positive links with the local community, employers and agencies in relation to progression routes and appropriate work placement opportunities. Learners are well supported in their work experience.

- Management are using social media innovatively in tracking learners’ progression once they leave the centre.

- Management and staff are commended for their mentoring of students. It would be beneficial for students to be more effectively engaged in identifying and tracking their achievement of short and long-term SMART learning goals.

2.3 Teaching, Learning and Attainment

- The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good across all subjects, with some scope for development in a small number of areas.

- Learning objectives were given at the beginning of lessons in many cases. Learners would benefit from consolidation of learning and from clear direction about what they will have learnt by the end of the lesson.

- Classrooms were attractively decorated with examples of learners’ work and materials to support literacy and numeracy. A good rapport was evident between learners and teachers and an excellent atmosphere prevailed in all lessons.

- There was good use of pair and group work during many lessons and this collaborative practice should be extended to all lessons. Classroom layout facilitated group work and was very good overall.

- Varied activity and a good pace were a feature of most lessons. Teachers should ensure that a wide range of methodologies is used in order to maintain learner interest and enthusiasm. ICT, including good use of film clips, was used to good effect in some lessons and its use should be extended.

- Learners were well engaged with learning and were enthusiastic about their achievements in many cases. They were appropriately affirmed and responded well to this.
• Work completed to date on subject planning is commended. However, in order to build on the good practice in place, yearly schemes of work would benefit from a common template.

2.4 Literacy and Numeracy
• There is a plan in place for the development of literacy and it is now important to introduce some elements of literacy and numeracy to all lessons.
• There was a commendable focus on oral and written literacy in some lessons which incorporated word banks, games and word searches. However, there were some lessons where there were no explicit references to literacy and numeracy.
• A numeracy plan should be developed. Agreed strategies to advance literacy and numeracy development should be incorporated into subject planning. One member of staff could assume a lead role in this area.

2.5 Life skills
• The co-ordinator and staff are very committed to the holistic development of the individual learners. There is a whole centre approach to the varied challenging needs of the learners. Life skills are being addressed through a range of practical classes, physical education, work experience, SPHE and a varied summer programme.
• The centre has made commendable efforts to increase the certification opportunities for learners. Certification in ICT would enhance the vocational programme for learners. Guidance and counselling is provided and an advocate from FÁS supports learners in career path planning.
• Management of learners was observed to be fair, sensitive and effective and a respectful relationship was evident between staff and learners. A learners’ council is in place but this could be further developed to strengthen the learner voice.
• The provision of a shared lunch one day a week would be beneficial for the personal and social development of learners.
• Management have taken a firm and effective stance in relation to a no-smoking policy at the centre and are commended for this. Recognition as a health-promoting centre should be explored.
• Parents and learners interviewed and surveyed during the evaluation were very positive about the work of the centre and the impact it was having on their lives.

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 centre is very well run and provides a warm and welcoming environment for learners and staff.
• The centre co-ordinator is highly effective and brings very good leadership skills to her role. The co-ordinator, together with the resource persons present as a competent and motivated team. Staff members are committed and are very supportive of the learners.
• The board of management supports the co-ordinator and provides a valuable forum for information exchange with community groups and services.
• The space available to the centre for its work is limited and possibilities regarding access to additional space should be explored and pursued as a priority.
• There is very good communication between the centre management and the WWETB Adult Education Officer.

3.2 The centre’s capacity for improvement and development

• The centre has engaged effectively with centre development planning through the internal evaluation process (ICE).
• Staff and learners are consulted as part of the ICE process and parents should also be consulted.
• Parents interviewed during the evaluation expressed a strong desire to participate or support the work of the centre in some way. This should be explored with a view to including parents more fully.
• Overall the centre has very good capacity for improvement and development.