



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Evaluation of Youthreach Provision Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Youthreach Athy
Seoladh na scoile/School address	FET Centre Kildare Wicklow Education & Training Board Carlow Rd Athy Co. Kildare
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	40423F
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	12-10-2023

What is an evaluation of Youthreach provision?

Evaluations of Youthreach provision are conducted in centres for education and community training centres. The evaluations examine the extent to which the centre is identifying and meeting the needs of the young people who attend it and the quality of the governance, leadership and management of the centre. They provide advice and support to teaching staffs, resource persons, centre coordinators and centre management.

How to read this report

During these inspection, the inspectors evaluated provision under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Identifying and meeting the needs of the young people
2. The governance, leadership and management of the centre

The board of management of the school 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.

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

Actions of the centre to safeguard young people

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the centre's child protection and procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the child safeguarding statement are prominently displayed near the main door of the centre / in the reception area
2. The centre's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All learning practitioners visited have reported that they have read the centre's child safeguarding statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as a mandated person
4. The centre's child safeguarding statement meets the requirements of Children First 2015.
5. The minutes of the last three board of management meetings contain a child protection oversight report
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all centre personnel on child protection procedures in line with Children First 2015
7. Centre planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, RSE)
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The centre met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Youthreach Centres are co-funded by the Government of Ireland, the European Social Fund and the Youth Employment Initiative as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020

Evaluation of Youthreach provision

Date of inspection	12-10-2023
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of six lessons• Engagement with learners during lessons and review of their work• Meetings with:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• centre management• staff• young people• parents/guardians• Adult Education Officer, KWETB	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant and available policies, documents and assessment data.• Feedback to centre coordinator, Adult Education Officer, and learning practitioners.

Centre context

Athy Youthreach was first established in 1989. It is under the auspices of Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB). It has the capacity to cater for thirty young people from Athy and the surrounding areas. Learners are offered Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI) courses in General Learning at levels three and four, along with Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and a summer programme which includes work experience. At the time of the evaluation, 24 students were enrolled.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory. There were aspects of good practice noted, as well as areas requiring improvement.
- Appropriate procedures were in place to identify and meet the needs of learners. Support for students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) was inadequate.
- The quality of curricular provision in the centre was satisfactory; the curriculum lacked sufficient variety to provide for student individual needs and there was limited access to vocational subjects.
- There was a strong sense of community evident in the centre and a real commitment from all staff to ensure learners were welcomed. Several effective support structures were in place for students' wellbeing.
- Overall, the quality of centre management and leadership was satisfactory. While good practice existed in a number of areas, strategic planning and policy development required improvement.

Recommendations

- To support greater student engagement and participation, learning practitioners should ensure that plans for teaching, learning, and training are further developed with an emphasis on the learning process.
- During the evaluation, it was noted that only half the number of students enrolled, attended. The AEO, coordinator and staff should look at the curriculum and its impact on attendance and implement measures to effect improvement.
- Centre management in collaboration with KWETB should identify and adopt measures to ensure that students with EAL are adequately supported.

- The centre coordinator and staff should further develop the use of Individual learning plans (IEPs) to inform teaching and learning and to establish goals, targets and pathways to progression aligned to the needs, abilities, and strengths of the individual learners, with a systematic process for review and monitoring of student progress.
- In order to ensure optimum use of the students' time in the centre and that students benefit fully from the induction programme at the start of the centre year, induction activities should take place in tandem with general learning and the programme should be developed further.
- The adult education officer (AEO), in collaboration with the centre coordinator, should develop a strategic action plan to address the identified needs and priority areas for development for Athy Youthreach. This plan should include actions to address issues in attendance, curriculum, CPD, policy development, health and safety and emerging issues communicated to the AEO through the coordinators fortnightly reports.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Identifying and meeting the needs of young people

Identifying learners' strengths, needs and interests

Overall, appropriate procedures were in place to support learner transitions. Commendably, the coordinator met with all new students and their parents/guardians several times during the admissions process. These initial interviews focused on identifying the young person's strengths, interests and needs and outlined the courses and services available. However, it was worth noting that the initial and ongoing assessment of students learning needs, including literacy and numeracy competencies, were based on tests devised by individual learning practitioners. This practice was at odds with the written admission policy that stated that standardised tests would be used. Centre management should review the policy and include testing processes that best assess the learning needs of the students and provide the most useful information to inform teaching and learning.

Since September 2023, the centre implemented a new process, on a trial basis, for enrolling students, during two intake periods, one in September and another in January. This system should be kept under review to ensure students who wish to attend the centre outside of these intake periods, do not experience prolonged waiting times when seeking admission.

All new students took part in an induction programme. This required them to attend one-hour sessions daily for two weeks. During these sessions, they met other students and staff, discussed what was involved in the various subject area, and an individual learning plan was developed which identified their goals. While having an induction programme in place is commendable, the chosen format requires review. Students should come in for the full centre day at the start of the year, and induction activities should take place in tandem with general learning. This measure should encourage students to develop a more positive attendance routine from the outset. Additionally, the induction programme should be developed further to promote life skills such as managing transitions and building relationships with other students and staff. Collaboration with the KWETB psychotherapist and guidance counsellor assigned to the centre is recommended as part of this development.

All new students were assigned a member of staff as their key worker following induction which is good practice. The key worker's role involved meeting with the student to develop their individual education plan (IEP). In addition, the key worker oversaw and supported the students during their two-week work experience. It was intended that throughout the year follow up meetings would be held to discuss students' progress and review their goals. However, these meetings did not take place consistently. It is recommended, that these meeting take place on a consistent basis and that they inform the development, monitoring and regular updating of individual IEPs to meet the emerging needs of learners and used to inform planning for teaching and learning.

Putting a suitable programme in place

The quality of curricular provision in the centre was satisfactory. All students were engaged in the same curricular programme at QQI General Learning level three or level four. In addition, co-curricular activities were provided for students with opportunities to explore and develop their creative and musical skills. During focus groups discussion with parents/guardians and learners, a common viewpoint emerged. Many felt that the curriculum lacked variety and there was limited access to vocational subjects. They believed that there was too much emphasis on the mandatory subject areas. They reported that, in their experience, the limitations of the curriculum did not meet their interests nor did it support their career aspirations, and this affected their motivation to engage fully and to attend regularly.

Additional vocational subjects, such as, childcare, engineering, mechanics, and hair and beauty would enhance the curriculum and better meet the needs of the young people. To ensure that the curriculum being offered meets the needs and interests of students, the centre coordinator, staff and Adult Education Officer (AEO) should conduct a review of the curriculum offered to develop a more student-centred curriculum and to ensure flexibility for students to engage with more opportunities for vocational training. It is crucial that this review is fully informed by the students and their parents/guardians and makes optimum use of existing expertise within the centre and includes a flexible approach to staff deployment on behalf of KWETB.

There were strong and very positive links between the centre coordinator and parents/guardians to support student attendance and retention. Governing systems for recording daily attendance and explanations for learner absenteeism were appropriately maintained. During the evaluation, it was noted that only half the number of students enrolled attended. It is recommended that the AEO, coordinator and staff look at the curriculum and its impact on attendance and implement measures to effect improvement. Furthermore, as part of this consultative process centre management should consider the programmes/subjects available to students and explore opportunities for them to engage in short-term electives and practical sessions to complement the taught curriculum to meet the needs and interests of students.

The quality of learner experiences

The overall quality of student participation and engagement was adequate in the lessons observed. Overall, lessons were characterised by mutually respectful interactions between learning practitioners and students. A positive and secure learning environment enabled the sharing of ideas and engagement with learning tasks.

In a minority of lessons, students purposefully engaged in their learning and were given opportunities to work together. These learning experiences included the use of placemats to discuss and share ideas around a theme, and the assignment of students to groups to collaboratively research and collate their ideas. This good practice was not universal. To ensure all students can contribute meaningfully in collaborative learning activities, clear instructions should be given with time-bound targets and assigned roles to meet the needs of all learners.

Effective learner experiences were evident in lessons when students were supported in making meaningful connections between the lesson content and students' own experiences and interests. For instance, to build awareness of how developments in information technology could impact on future employment prospects for people, students were tasked with conducting research, discussing their findings and presenting as part of a debate.

In almost all lessons, a digital application was used to assess students learning at the end of the class. Students enjoyed the competitive nature of the quizzes and they were motivated to complete all the questions. To enhance the value of engaging in quizzes, it is advised that learning practitioners develop their own assessment tasks and use the assessment data gathered to support lesson planning.

Support for students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) was less than satisfactory. During the evaluation of lessons it was evident that English language skills were impeding the learning of some students. Measures to ensure that students with EAL are adequately supported should be put in place as a matter of urgency. The KWETB should utilise all available resource options in supporting the centre to implement this recommendation.

The quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was satisfactory.

The learning outcomes for the majority of lessons were unclear. The intended learning was shared in terms of the tasks students would engage with rather than the knowledge, skills or content to be developed by the end of the class. There was scope for an incremental approach to allow students to make connections with prior learning and to build their capacity to reflect on whether they have achieved the intended learning outcomes.

In all lessons, students presented with a range of educational strengths and needs. However, in most lessons, students, regardless of learning need, were provided with the same task and level of challenge. This approach contributed to some students becoming disengaged from the learning process. It is recommended that learning practitioners integrate the use of active and differentiated learning approaches into lessons to ensure all learners are appropriately challenged.

In a minority of lessons, an appropriate emphasis was placed on developing students' literacy skills through a focus on understanding key vocabulary, and developing oracy skills through students presenting their work. To support the continued development of literacy and numeracy skills, learning practitioners should use the information from the assessments they administer during induction to inform their planning, with particular emphasis placed on the literacy needs of students.

In a few lessons, where students were studying aspects of the curriculum dealing with personal development, the learning activities overly-focused on using students own personal experience to drive discussions. In these cases, scenarios would have been useful and more appropriate. Learning practitioners should incorporate a scenario-based approach to allow students to access the learning through the perspective of a character, rather than from a personal perspective.

The overall quality of assessment was satisfactory. In the majority of lessons, whole-class oral questioning was the dominant assessment practice, which contributed to some students remaining passive and others taking a leading role in answering. In addition, many questions were lower order, requiring very brief answers, with learning practitioners then expanding on the answers themselves. It is recommended, that learning practitioners make greater use of collaborative strategies, such as think, pair, share and the provision of wait time, to support all students to engage actively.

Curriculum plans were available for all subjects outlining the learning outcomes and assessments for the programme however, these plans need to be developed further with a greater emphasis placed on the learning process rather than on the completion of workbooks.

Centre management should ensure that a programme of professional development is made available to learning practitioners to provide them with the necessary support to address the improvements needed in teaching and learning.

Structures and supports for learner wellbeing

Overall, the quality of support for students' wellbeing was satisfactory. There was a strong sense of community evident in the centre and a real commitment from all staff to ensure learners were welcomed. However, while there was provision for guidance and counselling that students could access, the planning in relation to this provision was insufficient to enable students to derive optimum benefit from it.

Throughout the evaluation, positive relations between staff and young people were evident in their interactions during lessons, in the communal kitchen area, and games room, as well as during break times. From these interactions, it was clear that young people and centre staff experienced a strong sense of safety and connection.

A structure designed to support students' wellbeing included providing weekly access to a psychotherapist. As part of the induction programme the psychotherapist met with all new students as a group and as individuals. Following these meetings, the young people had the opportunity to request one-to-one meetings. At the time of the evaluation, it was reported that uptake by students of the service was inconsistent.

The learners can access guidance counselling on a one-to-one basis if requested. The guidance counsellor is provided from the Further Education and Training Centre located in the same building. However, evidence that the students actually availed of this service, to date, was limited. To support young people to make informed educational, career and life choices they should have regular contact with the guidance counsellor. A whole-centre Guidance plan should be developed to outline the centre's approach to Guidance using the continuum of support model (All, Some, Few) and to describe how students will be supported and assisted in making choices for successful transitions.

During the focus group discussion, learners reported that while they were asked for their views on aspects of the summer provision and the use of mobile phones they generally felt they were not really listened to. Measures to ensure more meaningful student participation, and that students' views are fully heard, valued and actively listened to should be put in place. It is also essential that action, where possible, is taken on foot of student consultation.

2. The governance, leadership and management of the centre

Supporting the effective leadership and management of the centre

Overall, the quality of centre management and leadership was satisfactory. While good practice existed in a number of areas, strategic planning and policy development required significant improvement.

The quality of ETB support for the centre is satisfactory. At the time of the evaluation Athy Youthreach centre was under the governance of KWETB. An AEO was responsible for a number of Youthreach programmes in the Co. Kildare area and oversaw the work in each of the centres. The coordinator was responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre and all staff had clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The coordinator appropriately submitted fortnightly reports to the AEO and it was reported that there was regular communication between the coordinator and the AEO on matters requiring urgent attention. However, there was a need for a strategic action plan to address the identified needs and priority areas for centre development. This plan should include actions to address issues in attendance, curriculum, CPD, policy development, health and safety and emerging issues communicated to the AEO through the coordinators fortnightly reports.

The centre coordinator has put highly effective processes in place to communicate regularly with parents/guardians about all relevant issues pertaining to the young person and the centre. In focus group discussions with parents/guardians they demonstrated much appreciation for the approach of the staff who, they feel, have created a non-judgemental environment based on positive and supportive interactions.

All staff members who met with the evaluation team demonstrated a professional and committed approach to their work. Commendably, this commitment was recognised and praised by learners and their parents through meetings with the evaluation team and in their responses to questionnaires completed as part of the evaluation.

In keeping with good practice the coordinator has scheduled weekly meetings for staff to discuss matters related to the centre and updates on learner engagement. To further develop this practice there is scope to include teaching and learning on the agenda to provide opportunities for staff to share practice. In addition, actions arising should be noted and reviews of progress should be included in subsequent meetings.

Appropriate health and safety procedures were in place in the centre. Risk assessments had been conducted using the guidance and templates from the Health and Safety Authority and all machinery had clear safety signage. It was noted that issues were identified in a number of the Healthy and Safety audits conducted. The AEO and coordinator should progress these outstanding health and safety issues as a matter of urgency. In addition, there were a number of rooms that could be used for teaching and learning but are currently used for storage or needed to be upgraded.

Leading Centre Development

The centre's capacity for improvement and development was satisfactory. The AEO and Coordinator led a process of self-evaluation through the development of a Centre Evaluation and Improvement Plan (CEIP). It was commendable that this CEIP was developed in collaboration with all stakeholders and involved a two day facilitated consultation with the learners, centre staff, the coordinator, ETB management, parents/guardians and employers involved in providing work experience. However, the CEIP process failed to identify key issues that were relevant to Athy Youthreach or actions focussed at resolving ongoing issues in the centre, for example, delays in addressing issues with the centre's physical environment.

The AEO, in collaboration with the centre coordinator, should develop a strategic action plan to address the identified needs and priority areas for development for Athy Youthreach. This plan should include actions to address issues in attendance, curriculum, CPD, and management of resources, and emerging issues communicated to the AEO through the coordinators fortnightly reports.

In keeping with good governance practice, a number of KWETB common policies had been developed which included, the admissions procedure, SPHE, literacy and a draft code of behaviour. However, these policies were generic to Youthreach centres in KWETB and were not fully reflective of the views and needs of the students, learning practitioners, and parents/guardians of Athy Youthreach Centre. As part of the process of policy review and development systems should be put in place to ensure that policies are reflective of all stakeholders.

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the centre using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the centre's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some centres in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <i>outstanding</i> and provides an example for other centres of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	<i>Good</i> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The centre needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	<i>Satisfactory</i> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	<i>Fair</i> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The centre will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	<i>Weak</i> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-centre action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;

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 Inspection Report and the recognition of the many positive aspects of the Athy Youthreach Centre and its provision.

The Inspection Report encapsulates a snapshot in time during which there were significant staff shortages in the Centre due to sick leave, annual and vacant posts. These staff shortages necessitated changes to the timetables and a reduction in the number of subjects being taught during the period of the inspection.

KWETB welcomes the insightful recommendations as positive contribution to the development of the Centre and will implement all in full.

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

Since the completion of the inspection one vacant post has been filled and the other is in the final stages of the recruitment process. All other staff have returned to work resulting in the delivery of the full timetable to learners.

The development of strategic plan for the Centre is a priority for the ETB which will commence in early 2024. This will take a whole team approach to plan and map the development of the Centre over the coming 5 years.