



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Guide to Evaluations of Youthreach Provision in Centres for Education and Community Training Centres

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<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Context	3
1.2 Purpose of this guide	3
1.3 Evaluations in centres for education and community training centres	4
1.4 Key principles that inform inspections	6
1.5 The evaluation framework	6
<b>2. Evaluations of Youthreach Provision .....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Overview of evaluation activities	8
2.2 Before the evaluation	9
2.3 During the evaluation	10
2.4 Following the evaluation	13
<b>3. The Quality Continuum .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4. Review of inspections .....</b>	<b>17</b>

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education (DE) works to improve the quality of learning for children and young people in Irish schools, early learning and care settings, centres for education, community training centres and other settings. All evaluations are carried out in accordance with section 7(2)(b) and section 13(3)(a)(i) of the Education Act 1998.

Some centres for education are currently operating under the remit of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). A memorandum of understanding has been agreed between the DE and DFHERIS. This memorandum provides DE inspectors with the authority to carry out inspections in centres for Education which are under the remit of DFHERIS.

## 1.2 Purpose of this guide

This guide was developed following consultation with the education partners and sets out the approach to centres for education and community training centres. This is an updated version and replaces previous versions. It provides a general overview of the approach to whole-centre inspection. The evaluation model is carried out in accordance with the *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate* (2022) available at [gov.ie](https://www.gov.ie). During the evaluation, a centre's board<sup>1</sup> and its staff are obliged to accord the inspectors "every reasonable facility and co-operation" in the performance of their duties (Section 13(7), Education Act 1998).

A similar Guide to Inspection in Post Primary Schools is available [here](#). This guide provides a general overview of the approach to inspection in post-primary schools and also an outline of each of the inspection models used in post-primary schools. The Inspectorate reserves the right to use any of these models in centres for education and community training centres.

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<sup>1</sup> The board may be the board for a single centre for education or a board for a number of centres. For centres that do not have a board, the Adult Education Officer or Further Education and Training Director for the ETB will take the place of the board.

## 1.3 Evaluations in centres for education and community training centres

### Self-evaluation and quality assurance

A centre's self-evaluation and quality assurance processes and the external evaluation process are complementary, both focusing on the identification of effective practice and on improvement. The self-evaluation process gives centres a means of identifying strengths, addressing priorities, and of ensuring a whole-centre focus on improving specific aspects of training and skill development, teaching and learning, and governance, leadership and management. External evaluations take note of centres' identified priorities and assess their training and skill development, teaching and learning, and governance, leadership and management practices. Given this common focus on improvement, the Inspectorate will take account of centres' engagement with, and the outcomes of, self-evaluation and quality assurance in the course of its evaluations while remaining sensitive to the individual context factors of centres.

Learning practitioners, centre co-ordinators, and boards of management can improve the work of their centres significantly through self-evaluation and quality assurance processes. Robust self-evaluation and quality assurance involves reflective enquiry leading to action planning for improvement that is informed by evidence gathered within each centre's unique context. The process enables centres to use this evidence to identify meaningful and specific targets and actions for improvement that focus on training and skill development, teaching and learning practices and outcomes. It enables them to create and implement improvement plans, to measure their progress, and to identify their achievements.

All further education providers, including centres for education, are required to operate in accordance with the [Core Statutory Quality Assurance \(QA\) Guidelines](#) developed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). In addition, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are required to comply with the [Sector-Specific Statutory QA guidelines](#).

The main areas that are addressed by the QA guidelines and that apply to QQI programmes provided in centres are:

- Governance and Management of Quality
- Documented Approach to Quality Assurance
- Programmes of Education and Training
- Staff Recruitment, Management and Development
- Training and Skill Development, Teaching and Learning
- Assessment of young people
- Supports for young people

- Information and Data Management
- Public Information and Communication
- Other Parties involved in Education and Training
- Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Centres for education engage in a centre evaluation planning process as a requirement of the ETB. Additionally, some individual management boards, for example in community training centres, conduct their own strategic evaluation planning processes.

### **External evaluation of centres**

External evaluations of centres also facilitate improvement and change in centres. They provide an external perspective on the work of the centre. Inspectors and inspection reports provide judgements on the quality of provision in a centre, affirm the aspects of practice that are working well and help to inform and complement self-evaluation and quality assurance. Recommendations in inspection reports provide important direction for the centre community as it seeks to bring about ongoing improvement.

The purpose of the external evaluation is to:

- affirm good practice and to promote improvement, with a focus on training and skill development, teaching and learning, and governance, leadership and management
- provide a public assurance of the quality of provision within the centre
- ensure that all aspects of provision meet the individual and ongoing developmental needs of the young people
- promote self-evaluation and improvement within the centre

External evaluations support co-professional engagement between learning practitioners and the inspector. During these evaluations, the majority of the inspector's time is given typically to direct observation in learning settings, with a view to assessing the quality of provision and supporting improvement. The inspector's feedback to the learning practitioner and to the centre should enhance professional reflection and self-evaluation, and ultimately improve outcomes.

During evaluations, inspectors also provide opportunities for professional dialogue with the centre co-ordinator/manager on matters of particular relevance to the work of the centre. The recommendations provided at the end of an evaluation are specifically designed to promote whole-centre improvement.

## 1.4 Key principles that inform inspections

The Inspectorate is focused on ensuring that children and young people in centres receive the best possible education in the context of their potential and their learning needs. High standards in training and skill development, teaching and in the learning outcomes and experiences of children and young people are promoted by the Inspectorate as it strives to enable learning organisations to improve the quality of the education they provide.

Inspectors are committed to carrying out inspections in ways that provide real opportunities to affirm good practice and to provide practical advice to individual learning practitioners, to centre co-ordinators and to boards of management with the ultimate aim of improving learning experiences and outcomes for children and young people.

The work of the Inspectorate is underpinned by four key principles:

1. A focus on the learning of children and young people
2. Development and improvement
3. Respectful engagement
4. Responsibility and accountability

These key principles, described in detail in the [Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate \(2022\)](#), provide the standards that inform, guide and govern its work. They govern the full range of inspectors' evaluation and advisory work in all education settings. They provide a benchmark against which the Inspectorate, and others, can judge the quality of its professional practice.

## 1.5 The evaluation framework

*Looking at Our Centre* is a quality framework for centres of education and is used by inspectors to inform evaluations in these settings.

In designing the lines of enquiry for the evaluation, inspectors select the standards and statements of practice most appropriate to the needs of the young people in the centre. Thus, for example, in a centre that caters for a majority of young people for whom English is an additional language, an inspector will pay particular attention to the appropriateness of the learning experiences and approaches being used to address these needs.

An overview of *Looking at Our Centre* is presented in the figure below:

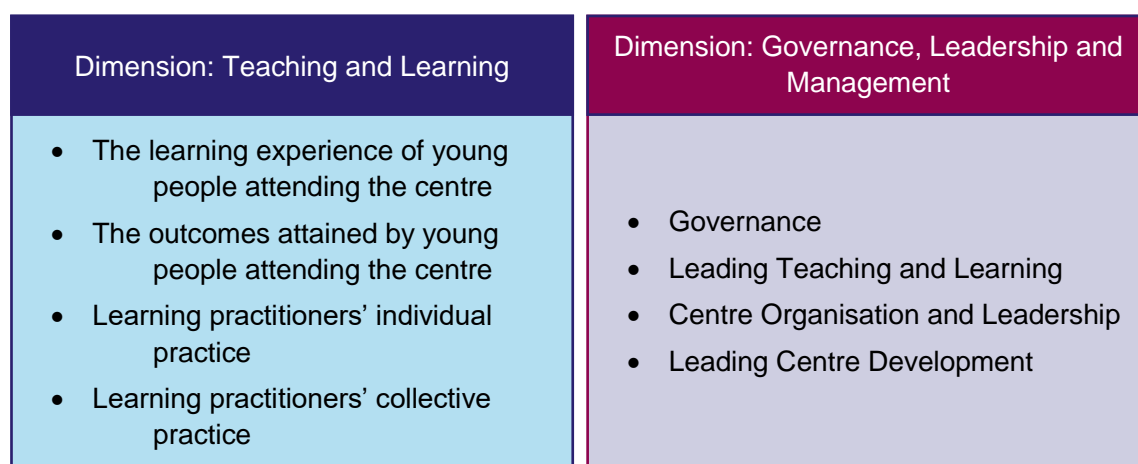


Figure 1: Evaluation framework for centres for education and community training centres

In the development of *Looking at Our Centre*, cognisance and consideration have being taken of the *Core and Sector-Specific Statutory QA Guidelines* developed by QQI.

## 2. Evaluations of Youthreach Provision

### 2.1 Overview of evaluation activities

The following is an overview of the evaluation activities which are undertaken as part of an evaluation of Youthreach provision.

Before the evaluation	Notification	Ten days' notification of the evaluation by email.
	Inspectorate activity	<p>Liaising between Inspectorate and centre co-ordinator to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establish a broad outline of evaluation activities</li> <li>• request documents, preferably provided electronically</li> <li>• outline the engagements to be held during the visit</li> <li>• provide suggested wording for and links to online surveys for the centre to issue to parents/guardians, staff and young people</li> <li>• seek timetable information to support planning for the in-centre week</li> </ul> <p>Email the centre information form and a number of centre documents to the centre co-ordinator.</p>
	Centre activity	Centre co-ordinator completes centre information form and returns it with required documentation and timetables to reporting inspector
During the evaluation visit	Inspectorate activity	<p>Meeting with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• centre management (including Chief Executive and/or Adult Education Officer of ETB / director of FET, board of management, CEO where relevant and the centre co-ordinator/manager)</li> <li>• staff</li> <li>• young people</li> <li>• parents/guardians</li> </ul>
		Observation and engagement in learning settings
		Interaction with young people and review of their work
		<p>Review of documents and assessment data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre improvement plans</li> <li>• Plans for training and skill development, teaching and learning</li> <li>• Individual support plans</li> <li>• Policies and procedures as outlined in section 2.3.2</li> </ul>
After the evaluation	Inspectorate activity	Post evaluation meetings with centre management (co-ordinator/manager), representative of the board and ETB, CEO where relevant and centre staff
		Collated survey data shared with the centre
		Draft report issued to the co-ordinator and chairperson of the board/CE of ETB and CEO where relevant for factual verification and for centre response
	Centre activity	Draft Report reviewed for factual verification
		Centre may submit a response to the report
	Inspectorate activity	Publication of the report on the gov.ie (reports arising from the current trial phase will <b>not</b> be published on the gov.ie)



## 2.2 Before the evaluation

### 2.2.1 Notice

Centres are typically given ten days prior written notice of an evaluation. The notification is copied by email to the chief executive of the relevant ETB and the chair of the board/CEO, where relevant.

Following the official notification, the reporting inspector contacts the centre co-ordinator/manager to outline the format of the evaluation, to arrange meetings, and to clarify any specific issues.

### 2.2.2 Documents

#### ***The centre information form***

The centre co-ordinator/manager, in collaboration with ETB management, is requested to complete a centre information form in electronic format. The completed form should be returned to the reporting inspector by email as soon as possible following its receipt.

#### ***Centre documentation***

The evaluation team examines a limited range of policy and procedural documents in advance of the inspection visit. These documents, which typically include those listed below, should be provided to the reporting inspector in electronic format, wherever possible.

- Enrolment and admissions policy
- Centre attendance policy
- Code of behavior
- Child protection policy/vulnerable adult safeguarding policy
- Centre Evaluation and Improvement Plan or equivalent
- Special Educational Needs policy (For Centres involved in the [Special Educational Needs Initiative](#))

### 2.2.3 Surveys

Surveys are used to gather the perspectives of parents/guardians<sup>2</sup>, young people and staff on aspects of the work of the centres. The various surveys are conducted online. The inspector sends links for each of the surveys to the centre co-ordinator. The inspector also

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<sup>2</sup> Surveys are only administered to parents/guardians of young people under the age of eighteen

provides sample wording that the co-ordinator could use when communicating about the surveys to various parties. Centre co-ordinators should send the survey links via text message to all parents/guardians, young people and staff of the centre.

The survey results provide an insight into the performance and operation of the centre. Information gained from the analysis of survey results may be referred to in the inspection report, but detailed statistical information is not included. A summary of the aggregated data is provided to the centre; no individual is identifiable from the survey results.

## 2.3 During the evaluation

This section describes the range of activities undertaken during the evaluation. In conducting the evaluation, inspectors take account of the context and circumstances of the setting. In light of this, inspectors will, within the guidelines and the principles set out in the [Code of Practice for the Department of Education Inspectorate \(2022\)](#), have reasonable flexibility to exercise professional judgement on the range of activities that will be carried out during the evaluation. The inspection typically takes place over three days and is conducted by two inspectors.

### 2.3.1 Meetings and interviews

During the inspection, meetings and interviews are held to gather information and evidence to inform the evaluation.

Meetings typically take place with:

- Senior management of the centre
- Chief Executive and/or the Adult Education Officer of the ETB and/or the Director of Further Education (FET)
- Board of management
- Centre co-ordinator
- Learning practitioners
- Group of parents
- Group of young people

Additional meetings may be convened by the evaluation team, if deemed necessary.

These meetings provide the evaluation team with an insight into the experience of day-to-day life in the centre from a range of perspectives. The Inspectorate takes a rights-based and strengths-based approach in meeting with young people during inspection. To help them understand what an inspection is and how meetings transact, the Inspectorate has put together some resources for young people, parents and educators. They are available [here](#).

### **2.3.2 Visits to learning settings**

Inspectors visit a number of learning settings. The daily schedule of lesson observations is provided to the centre co-ordinator at the beginning of each day. The focus of these observations is not limited to specific subject areas and lessons are selected from across the curriculum offered in the centre.

Lesson observations focus primarily on evaluating the quality of learning, with a particular focus on the extent to which learning activities are meeting the needs of young people. As lessons vary in duration, nature and style, inspection methods also vary in order to obtain evidence upon which to base judgments about learning, training and skill development and teaching. The inspector engages with young people about their learning during visits to learning settings.

Oral feedback is provided to individual learning practitioners at the end of lessons or at another time during the in-centre evaluation. The feedback relates to the overall quality of learning, training and skill development and teaching in the lesson. Observed good practice is acknowledged and affirmed and recommendations for improvement are made, where appropriate.

### **2.3.3 Documents**

While the evaluation focuses principally on the work of the centre as it transacts daily, inspectors examine a small number of documents during the evaluation. In addition to the documents requested in advance of the inspection visit, the following documentation should be available in the centre during the evaluation:

- Literacy and Numeracy policy
- Records of young peoples' attainment, retention and completion
- Information on transfer and progression of young people
- Learning practitioner individual planning documents (termly/yearly)

An inspector may also request additional documents or records which are relevant to the evaluation.

### **2.3.4 Evaluating professional practice**

While evaluations of centres involve an evaluation of the professional practice of learning practitioners and the quality of learning facilitated, the inspection process is not a professional competence inspection. However, where an inspector has serious concerns about the quality of learning, training and skill development and teaching in an individual lesson observed, those concerns will be shared with the co-ordinator/manager, CEO where relevant, and the learning practitioner as part of the feedback provided.

Where concerns relate to management and/or leadership in the centre, they are shared with the co-ordinator/manager and with the chairperson of the board and/or the representative of the Chief Executive of the ETB as part of the feedback provided.

### 2.3.5 Compliance with Child Protection Procedures

As part of the Department's oversight of the implementation of appropriate child protection procedures for centres of education and community training centres, inspectors monitor compliance with the following during the evaluation:

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

A number of checks above make reference to a board of management and the minutes of the board meetings. In some cases, there may be one board with responsibility for a number of centres. In these cases, the minutes of the most recent three meetings of **that** board should be made available to the inspector. Where there is no board of management, the Adult Education Officer has line management responsibility and should provide the Child Protection Oversight Report to the Further Education and Training (FET) Director. Records of the provision of the three most recent reports should be made available to the inspector by the FET Director.

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<sup>3</sup> May be conducted before the inspection visit

<sup>4</sup> As Community Training Centres are not required to include SPHE and RSE on their curriculum, this check is only conducted in Centres for Education

### 2.3.6 Unsolicited Communication

Unsolicited communications are pieces of information that have been brought to the attention of the Inspectorate but have not been sought, requested or invited. They may be in written or verbal form, signed or anonymous. The Inspectorate considers and responds to all unsolicited communications received before and/or during inspections in line with its statutory and other procedural obligations if such communications are relevant to the particular evaluation framework or model of evaluation.

In responding to unsolicited communications, the Inspectorate is committed to maintaining its objectivity and impartiality and treating those who provide unsolicited communication and those who are the subject of the unsolicited communication fairly. It is also committed to taking account of all sources of evidence and not giving undue weight to any particular source of information. If the unsolicited communication is of relevance to the evaluation, the Inspectorate will share the substance of the communication with the subject of the communication during the evaluation and allow them a reasonable opportunity to provide a response.

A record will be kept of all information provided. While the Inspectorate will respect confidences when receiving information, it cannot in every circumstance guarantee the absolute confidentiality of the information provided, or the anonymity of the individual person or persons providing the information because a right of response may necessitate the provision of relevant information to a third party, including the identity of the person providing the information.

### 2.3.7 Records management

Records relating to inspections are processed in accordance with the Department of Education records management procedures and its [Data Protection Policy](#).

## 2.4 Following the evaluation

### 2.4.1 Feedback meetings

The evaluation team reviews the evidence collected and drafts the key findings and recommendations arising from the evaluation. The evaluation team returns to the centre<sup>5</sup> to

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<sup>5</sup> Typically within a week of the completion of the in-centre evaluation

present and discuss the draft findings and recommendations with key centre personnel to include:

- The centre co-ordinator
- ETB management (Chief Executive and/or Adult Education Officer Director of FET or other)
- Board of management representatives
- Centre staff
- CEO where relevant

These meetings provide an opportunity for discussion of the outcomes of the inspection and are an important part of the evaluation process. They allow for communication of the draft findings of the evaluation and provide opportunities for clarification.

#### **2.4.2 The inspection report**

A draft inspection report is finalised following the completion of the feedback meetings. The report presents the key findings and recommendations arising from the evaluation. It is processed through the normal quality assurance procedures of the Inspectorate and is issued to the centre for factual verification and later for centre response as prescribed in [Guidelines for the Publication of School Inspection Reports \(2015\)](#).

#### **2.4.3 Publication of the inspection report**

The finalised report and the centre's response are published on the website of the Department of Education ([www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie)).

#### **2.4.4 Acting on the inspection report**

The board and the ETB, where relevant, as part of its agenda for improvement, should discuss the findings and recommendations in the evaluation report and should, along with the centre co-ordinator, ETB management and CEO where relevant, plan for and oversee the implementation of the actions needed to address the report's recommendations. The report should also be used by the centre, along with other types of evidence gathered by the centre, to inform its self-evaluation processes and its planning for improvement and development.

Responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the recommendations and improvements in a report rests mainly with the board and co-ordinator/manager and with the Chief Executive of the ETB / CEO.

The Inspectorate and other divisions of the Department of Education will monitor the implementation of recommendations in selected centres and in the system generally. The

degree to which progress has been made on the implementation of recommendations in the report may be evaluated at a later date by the Inspectorate.

### 3. The Quality Continuum

In analysing and reporting on their findings, inspectors use a quality continuum. Examples of the language used in reports to describe the quality of practice in a centre with regard to the quality continuum are provided in *Table 1* below.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 outstanding 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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 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 very good standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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 learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and co-ordinated 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

Table 1: The quality continuum



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## 4. Review of inspections

A learning practitioner or a board affected by an inspection may seek a review of the inspection using the procedures outlined in *Procedure for the Review of Inspections carried out by the Department of Education Inspectorate under Section 13(9) of the Education Act 1998 (2022)* which is available on the Department's website [here](#)