An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Evaluation of Youthreach Provision
REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Longford Youthreach
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Connolly Campus, Battery Road, Longford, N39K7W4
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	42345V
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	21/05/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	20/10/2025

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

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.

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.

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.

An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais, Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Youthreach Centres are funded by both the Government of Ireland and the European Union

Evaluation of Youthreach provision

Date of inspection	19/05/2025-21/05/2025

Inspection activities undertaken
 	
• Observation and engagement in learning settings
• Interaction with young people and review of their work
• Meetings with:
  • centre management
  • staff
  • young people
  • parents/guardians
	• Review of documents and assessment data:
	  • Centre improvement plans
	  • Plans for training and skill development, teaching and learning
	  • Individual support plans
	  • Relevant policies and procedures
	
	• Feedback to centre coordinator, ETB management and practitioners

Centre context

Longford Youthreach operates under Longford-Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) and participates in the Special Educational Needs Initiative (SENI). The centre provided Quality and Qualification Ireland (QQI) courses at level two, three and four. There were twenty-six learners enrolled at the time of the evaluation. It was staffed by a coordinator and a team of eight learning practitioners, supported by a psychotherapist and a guidance counsellor from LWETB's Further Education and Training (FET) adult guidance service, on a part-time basis.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The staff at Longford Youthreach presented as dedicated, committed, and experienced in Youthreach provision.
- The quality of the learners' experience was good; the environment was caring, supportive, and welcoming.
- The quality of training, teaching and learning in the centre was very good; practitioners were open to new ideas and demonstrated high quality reflective practice.
- Overall, the quality of governance, leadership and management was good. Effective leadership existed in many areas, but key organisational processes such as strategic planning and policy development required significant improvement.
- There was strong leadership and management and high levels of committment to the personal wellbeing of the learners and their future in the work of the coordinator.
- The staff worked diligently to strengthen links with the local community and to demonstrate the centre's value to the wider community.

Recommendations

- To enhance the effectiveness of the induction process, induction should be reviewed and strengthened to include structured diagnostic testing and formalised data-sharing procedures with feeder schools for the timely transfer of learner data.
- Centre management should review the learners' literacy and numeracy needs to inform the development of a whole-centre literacy and numeracy policy. This policy should embed targeted support into teaching and assessment practices, including strategies for teaching English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).
- Staff and management should be upskilled in the effective use of individual learning plans (ILPs) and individual actions plans (IAPs), ensuring that ILPs aligned with IAPs, are

explicitly used to guide teaching strategies, differentiation and learner support tailored to each learner's needs and goals.

- To strengthen governance and oversight structures, LWETB should establish a board of management for the Centre.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Identifying and meeting the needs of young people

Learner Experiences

The overall quality of learners' experience was good. A highly committed coordinator and team of practitioners fostered a caring, inclusive and welcoming environment. Feedback from learners and parents was very positive. However, there was scope for development in the areas of assessment, progress monitoring and targeted literacy and numeracy support.

Initial assessment of the strengths, interests and needs of the young people

There was good initial assessment of learners' strengths, needs and interests. As part of induction, learners participated in two interviews with the coordinator. These interviews focused on the young person's prior learning experience, achievements, challenges encountered, alongside their interests, strengths, needs, and aspirations. This approach was effective in determining learners' suitability for Youthreach and supported the initial planning stages.

The induction programme, underpinned by the promotion of positive relationships, was highly effective in easing transition into the centre and promoting empathy between learners. Following placement, learners received a tour of the centre, were provided with an induction pack and a presentation on the centre's ethos and policies, and engaged in team-building activities.

The absence of a guidance counsellor at the point of induction and limited access to educational records from feeder schools hindered a full understanding of learners' needs. Centre-designed assessments were used to support the identification of learners' literacy and numeracy needs. The data informed the development of learners' profiles and planning for individual learning plans (ILPs) and individual action plan (IAPs). However, to enhance the effectiveness of the induction process, it is recommended that it is reviewed and strengthened to include structured diagnostic testinging, integrated ESOL support and formalised data-sharing procedures with feeder schools for the timely transfer of learner data.

Use of initial assessment information

Overall, there was scope for development in how the centre used initial assessment data to inform planning for the progression of learning. Following initial assessments, learners engaged in one-to-one planning meetings with the SENI coordinator to co-develop ILPs. This process focused on understanding each learner's personal and social contexts to inform mentoring approaches and programme planning. This valuable approach also informed tailored mentoring strategies to support the planning of QQI programmes and the creation of integrated ILPs and IAPs. These ILP/IAP included a learner profile, short- and long-term goals, the *WebWheel* mentoring process, and progress indicators. While this integrated document provided some support strategies, it contained limited detail on specific literacy and numeracy supports or interventions to support targeted planning for the progression of learning.

To enhance the effectiveness of planning for the progression of learning, the centre should maxmise the use of assessment data to inform differentiated teaching, targeted interventions, and learner-centred planning. Staff should be upskilled, and ILPs and IAPs should be developed in line with best practice. Additionally all plans should be regularly reviewed with learners, to monitor progress, evaluate the impact of interventions, and to update goals, targets and teaching approaches.

Putting the right programme in place

The centre offered a broad and balanced curriculum aligned with Youthreach principles. The centre offered QQI Levels two, three and four, mentoring, work experience, and personal development modules. As a Youthreach centre partaking in SENI, staff were strongly aware of the diverse needs of learners.

Modules delivered throughout the year included; Mathematics, Communications, Career Preparation, Health and Safety Awareness, Information and Communication Technology, Understanding Interculturalism, Personal Effectiveness, Physical Education, Microsoft Word, Spreadsheet Methods, Visitor and Tourism Care. Learners also engaged in practical modules such as cookery, container gardening, barista training, and driver theory preparation.

Learners reported high engagement with practical and experiential learning opportunities. Learners said they enjoyed hands-on modules, such as, Breakfast Cookery, Short Order Cookery, Nutrition and Healthy Options, Physical Education and manual handling, the driver theory test preparation, safe pass preparation, the photography workshop, the barista course, and the introduction to barbering aligned to the summer programme.

In keeping with best practice, the summer programme was developed collaboratively with learners. Work experience, a cornerstone of summer provision, was promoted during the year, for the month of July. To enhance their readiness for work placement, learners participated in preparatory workshops, CV writing, and simulated interviews.

At the time of evaluation, the majority of learners were engaged with QQI level three and four learning programmes. Due to demand for places at the centre from lower age groups, the centre had more learners at QQI level three programmes and did not offer QQI Level Five. Both learners and their parents/guardians expressed a strong interest in expanding the practical learning opportunities available at the centre and having access to QQI level five modules for learners. There was enthusiasm for the inclusion of pre-apprenticeship modules in areas such as, Engineering, Health and Beauty, Childcare, and Nail Art. The possibility of adding such curricular additions, should be explored as part of a curricular review, aligned with the interests and aspirations of the learners.

Positive environments

The centre provided a bright, clean, and well-maintained campus that fostered a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. The environment celebrated learners' achievements across academic, sporting, and musical domains. Learners expressed a strong sense of belonging and ease, reflecting the centre's success in creating a safe and affirming space.

Respectful and affirming relationships were central to the centre's ethos and culture. Parents/guardians highlighted how their children felt valued and respected. The weekly psychotherapy service and mentoring system were particularly praised for supporting emotional and social development. Learners described the centre as offering "a second chance" in education – underpinning its restorative and inclusive approach.

Promoting attendance

Attendance levels at the time of evaluation were below the centre's average, however, overall attendance rates were good. The coordinator demonstrated a proactive and empathetic approach, maintaining strong relationships with learners and their families to support good levels of engagement.

Low attendance during the first lesson of the day was a recurring issue for a significant minority. Learners and parents suggested that a more diverse and interest-led curriculum could positively influence attendance.

Meeting learner needs through effective teaching and training

The quality of training, teaching and learning observed was very good. The majority of lessons were well-structured, purposeful and supported learner engagement and progress.

Overall, lessons were well-prepared, with clear learning intentions shared at the outset. This practice helped learners to understand the purpose of their learning and supported their active participation in tasks and portfolio work. Learners worked independently and collaboratively, with a good balance maintained between teachers' instruction and learner-centred activities. Digital learning activities were well embedded in practice. All learners had

access to digital devices, which they used regularly for research and task completion. Practitioners used digital tools to present content and model solutions, and a secure digital environment supported the sharing of learning materials.

While classrooms were generally well-resourced, the learning environment in some rooms could have been further enhanced by displaying more learner-centred content, such as subject specific posters, charts and key terms.

A sample of subject plans were reviewed. These plans provided some detail about the intended learning outcomes and the course content to be covered. However, there was scope to strengthen the integration of ILP data into lesson planning to inform targeted areas for improvement. Going forward, it is recommended that ILPs are used more explicitly to inform teaching strategies, differentiation and learner support. Ensuring planning is tailored to individual learner needs and goals.

Assessment and Feedback

Assessment practices were good. Teachers used a variety of questioning techniques, to check understanding and to promote learner voice. Learners were encouraged to explain their thinking and opportunities for discussion were a strong feature of lessons. Oral feedback was constructive and supportive, with targeted and affirmative written formative feedback evident in the majority of learner work reviewed.

To further enhance assessment for learning, it is recommended that a broader range of assessment methodologies be used in lessons, to include self-assessment aligned to success criteria. This practice would assist learners to take ownership and responsibility for editing and improving their work, alongside assisting practitioners and learners to identify gaps in learning.

Literacy and Numeracy Support

Planning for literacy and numeracy support at the centre required improvement. While learners' literacy and numeracy competencies were assessed at induction; there was limited evidence of targeted support or referral processes in the ILPs reviewed. The absence of structured interventions and cross-curricular planning for literacy and numeracy interventions limited the centre's capacity to address individual learners' needs effectively.

To support improvement in strategic planning for the progression of literacy and numeracy, a whole-centre approach to literacy and numeracy development is recommended. This approach should include clear planning for how needs will be identified and addressed across subjects, the integration of literacy and numeracy targets into ILPs and IAPs and the comprehensive development of a literacy and numeracy policy, with input from all stakeholders. Such an approach should align with the *Literacy for Life Strategy*, ensuring all learners are supported to develop the core literacy skills necessary for progression in learning, employment and life.

Promoting learner wellbeing

The centre's commitment to promoting learner wellbeing was highly effective. Weekly one-to-one mentoring and psychotherapy sessions provided learners with a safe and supportive space to explore personal challenges, celebrate achievements, and build emotional and personal resilience. These practices contributed positively to learner agency and personal growth and development.

The centre's participation in the school meals programme enabled the provision of nutritious breakfast and lunches. Mealtimes were used effectively in the centre to build and promote a spirit of community. A ban on soft drinks was respected by all, reflecting a shared commitment to the promotion of healthy lifestyle choices.

Recent successes for the boys' soccer team in the All-Ireland Youthreach final, in addition to the Gaelic Football final, were justly celebrated by learners and staff. Other sports and activities such as girls' soccer, tag rugby, canoeing, bowling, and Gaelic football, Zumba, music, pool, and table tennis, supported learner engagement and celebrated individual learners' talents, sporting and musical.

2. The governance, leadership and management of the centre

Overall, the leadership and management of the centre was good, with clear strengths in the day-to-day running of the centre. The work of coordinator demonstrated strong organisational leadership and supported a positive, learner-centred culture. However, aspects of governance required significant improvement to ensure more robust oversight.

Oversight and Governance

The Longford Youthreach Centre was led by the coordinator, reporting to the newly appointed Adult Education Officer (AEO). Oversight was provided by the AEO who played an active role in supporting and monitoring the centre's work through regular informal visits and meetings. However, there was no board of management in place to provide adequate oversight and input into policy development and review. LWETB should now prioritise the establishment of a board of management for the centre to strengthen accountability, facilitate stakeholder engagement in policy and curriculum review and development and to ensure the systematic review of all policies.

A review of staff meeting minutes and policy documentation revealed that many of the centre's policies were outdated and had not been reviewed. It was welcomed that senior leadership acknowledged the need for a more systematic approach for policy review, development and ratification, this should now be put in place.

The AEO was committed to improvement and played a key role in securing resources to enhance the centre's facilities. Weekly meetings between the AEO and the FET director were reported as focusing on programme planning, information sharing, and staff development.

Professional learning opportunities were made available through LWETB in areas such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and child safeguarding. Feedback from staff meetings and the Centre's Evaluation and Improvement Planning (CEIP) process, indicated a need for a more structured approach to professional development tailored to the needs of the centre, alongside action planning to support strategic improvement.

Leadership and Staff Collaboration

The coordinator provided highly effective leadership. Regular staff meetings with planned agendas were held to address operational matters, professional learning needs and the wellbeing of both learners and staff.

In addition to staff meetings, regular mentoring team meetings and care team meetings were held, alongside informal morning briefings. These structures supported effective communication and coordination among staff. Issues arising were escalated to the AEO, and discussed at fortnightly FET campus meetings, ensuring clear lines of communication and oversight for day-to-day matters.

Continuous improvement and self-evaluation

The quality of the centre's engagement with the CEIP process was very good. It was inclusive, collaborative and reflective, with meaningful input from staff, learners, parents/guardians, the ETB and outside agencies such as, the Traveller Mediation Service, LEAP Project, Foróige, Longford Community Resources Ltd, and community enterprises.

The CEIP process contributed to the identification and implementation of several impactful initiatives. Notable achievements included the development of the Equality Plan and the scheduling of Child Protection training for May 2025. Priority areas included the establishment of a learner council, the reinstatement of foreign travel opportunities, and support to strengthen and encourage progression to Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) and QQI level five programmes.

To enhance the CEIP process, it is recommended that action plans are developed, outlining the individual(s) responsible for each action and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable,

Realistic, Time-Bound) targets, and that the agreed actions arising from the targets be monitored, evaluated and regularly discussed.

Effective communication channels

The centre had established a broad network of links with local statutory and voluntary organisations. These relationships were effective in supporting opportunities for work placement.

Parents/guardians that participated in the focus group meeting expressed high levels of satisfaction with the centre's communication practices. The coordinator and the team of staff were commended for their respectful, flexible, and learner-centered approach. This approach included the tailoring of parent/guardian meetings to accommodate family needs, reinforcing the centre's commitment to inclusion and partnership.

Supporting progression

Support for learners' progression to further education, training and employment required significant improvement overall. While weekly mentoring sessions and scheduled career preparation lessons were in place, most learners did not have access to structured, one-to-one guidance from the career guidance counsellor. This gap in guidance support reduced the learners' ability to explore and plan meaningful progression pathways. In addition, feedback from learners and parents/guardians revealed concern around financial barriers to accessing further education and training (FET). The impact of these interrelated factors were reflected in the centre's tracking data, which showed low rates of successful transition to FET or sustained employment.

At the time of evaluation, the LWETB's FET guidance service had recently introduced guidance counselling on a phased basis for some level four learners preparing to complete QQI Level Four. Discussions were reported as being underway to expand this much needed service for all learners; a development warmly welcomed by centre staff.

In line with the priorities of SOLAS and the FET Strategy, a comprehensive review of progression supports should be conducted, with a focus on enabling all learners to access appropriate guidance to meaningfully explore and plan pathways into further education, training, and employment.

Promoting the agency of young people

The centre's' participation in the *Planet Youth* surveys to promote wellbeing in adolescents and children provided a meaningful platform for learners to contribute to internal practice and regional policy. This engagement empowered learners to influence decision-making processes to promote wellbeing, thereby, promoting their sense of agency and civic participation. While the centre had a strong foundation in promoting learner agency, further work was needed to re-establish key structures such as the learner council. This would provide a mechanism for learner representation and ensure that learner-voice contributes to policy, curriculum, and culture, and as such the centre should appoint a learner council.

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	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

Published October 2025 / Foilsithe Deireadh Fómhair 2025