

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

YOUTH INSPECTION

Ballykeel Youth Centre, Ballymena,
County Antrim

Report of a Follow-up Inspection in May 2022



Providing Inspection services for:
Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments



Follow-up to the inspection of Ballykeel Youth Centre, Ballymena

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out a follow-up inspection of Ballykeel youth centre in Ballymena in February 2019, which concluded that the centre needed to address important areas for improvement identified in the interest of all of the learners. The following areas needed to be addressed:

- to demonstrate evidence of improvement based on actions taken as a result of robust self- evaluation;
- to include a strategic plan for the recruitment and retention of youth support workers and volunteers; and
- to review the outcomes and targets in the current Curriculum Development Agreement (CDA) to ensure they are realistic and achievable given the current staff complement.

The ETI conducted a second follow-up inspection in May 2022. The ETI were presented with an appropriate updated action plan during the follow-up inspection.

In the interval since the first follow-up inspection, the following key actions and changes which affect the work of the centre have taken place:

- the staff team has increased to 13 part-time staff and four volunteers; three of the part-time staff team progressed from previously being volunteers;
- the Education Authority (EA) has provided additional support for young people in the Ballykeel area; for example, through the provision of the CADI¹ and FLARE² programmes, and the appointment of a new area youth worker for Ballymena (South);
- during the COVID-19 pandemic, the centre was periodically closed for generic youth provision, but continued to provide services for young people and their families; for example, through the Stay Connected and Eat Well Live Well initiatives;
- five of the young people from Ballykeel youth centre represent their peers on the 'Youth Voice for Mid and East Antrim';
- the membership of the centre has grown significantly from the original inspection, when 85 young people were enrolled; the current membership is 270; and
- a new strategic plan for the recruitment and retention of staff has been established.

¹ CADI: EA Youth Service Creative Arts and Digital Innovators Programme

² FLARE: EA Facilitating Life And Resilience Education Programme

Key findings

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the centre staff provided extensive support for the young people and their families. The centre, as a 'Hub' for three council areas, provided 6250 meals each week for young people in need. Additional support for young people struggling with emotional and social issues was also provided throughout the pandemic and this continues to be an appropriate focus for the current programmes.
- The self-evaluation and reflective practice of the youth work staff in the centre is improving the youth work provision for the young people. The staff's regular evaluation of the impact of their work informs their planning and is well focussed on the needs of the young people. The membership of the centre has grown significantly since the original inspection, particularly among the junior members. The staff have identified appropriately the need to increase further the senior membership and are taking actions to address this issue.
- The curriculum for the centre is broad and well matched to the needs and interests of the young people who value the welcoming and well-resourced facilities within the centre. They also highlighted the excellent relationships that they enjoy with one another and with the responsive and caring staff.
- The centre leadership and management team have reviewed the outcomes and targets in the current CDA making them realistic and achievable. Furthermore, the increased level of staffing and their enhanced capacity to deliver is impacting positively on the management of the centres' programmes.
- The strategic planning for the recruitment and retention of staff has successfully increased the numbers of staff and built their capacity to deliver a more extensive programme. Additional training, including supporting young people with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and domestic violence, has increased the knowledge and understanding of the staff to deal with the range of challenging issues faced by the young people.
- The senior members are actively involved in leadership roles. Within the centre, they volunteer across the programmes and have developed effective leadership and communication skills. Through their effective participation in the Mid and East Antrim Youth Voice, the young people represent themselves, their community and their peers. In discussions with the young people, they highlighted how they value the opportunities to meet young people from other communities and that they enjoy learning about their differing experiences and points of view.

Overall effectiveness

The Ballykeel youth centre now demonstrates, the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.

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