

Vocational Education and Training and engagement of young people in Youth Detention.

The Brisbane Youth Education & Training Centre is an Education Queensland school situated within the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre. Opened in 2001 the centre is an amalgamation of two previous youth detention centres in Brisbane.

The challenge on establishment was to provide a holistic provision of education, developmental and therapeutic services to young people.

The Brisbane Youth Detention Centre is operated by the Queensland Department of Communities and provides a case management team, therapeutic services and a programs team delivering developmental activities during and outside school time.

The school operates during normal Queensland school terms and is staffed by registered teachers and support staff.

The educational philosophy that everyone can succeed is promoted and evident. Careful assessment of academic ability along with empowering decision making around individual learning plans facilitates engagement of young people in a supportive educational environment where individual, differentiated success and achievement are apparent and celebrated.

School profile

Previously Youth Detention Centre schools offered a limited range of subjects under subregistration arrangements with external providers e.g. TAFE Colleges or School of Distance Education. Teaching staff were defacto learning facilitators with all class materials provided externally. This led to a lack of enthusiasm in delivery and assessment with materials becoming dated, reduced understanding of delivery and assessment requirements with little contact with providers, problematic student engagement and a high level of school refusal and behaviour management issues.

The Brisbane Youth Education & Training Centre has worked to address these inadequacies. The school is now a Registered Training Organisation under the Queensland Studies Authority with a scope to deliver a range of Vocational Education and Training Certificates. We currently offer:

- Certificate I Vocational Access
- Certificate I Engineering
- Certificate I Furnishing
- Certificate I Hospitality
- Certificate I Business
- Certificate I Information Technology
- Certificate II Business
- Certificate II Information Technology
- Certificate I Work Readiness

Delivery and assessment strategies, policies and materials have been developed locally by staff. This has engendered an intimate working knowledge of the training

areas offered, staff and student engagement with the curriculum offerings, ongoing review and development of curriculum offerings and a high rate of participation of young people in Vocational Education and Training.

A range of other school offerings complement the vocational curriculum:

- Art
- Sport
- Ceramics
- Cooking
- Woodwork
- Cultural Studies

The Department of Communities programs staff also provide a range of developmental areas:

- Horticulture
- Music
- Fitness
- Centre grounds maintenance

Staff profile

Currently 19.1 teaching staff, 253 hours per week teacher aide time, Registrar, Transition Officer, 3 Administration Assistants and visiting Guidance Officer, Speech Language Pathologist and Advisory Visiting Teachers for Intellectual Impairment, Speech Language Impairment and Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

Teachers are experienced in a range of vocational areas and also experienced and qualified in delivery and assessment of vocational education and training.

Student profile

Young people aged from 10 years to 17 years. There is provision under the Juvenile Justice Act for transfer to adult prison although young people may stay in youth detention after age 17 when cases are review on an individual basis.

A high degree of disrupted education along with dysfunctional social and emotional presentation, intellectual impairment and learning difficulties is evident in a higher percentage than State High Schools.

The Brisbane Youth Detention Centre has a capacity of 104 beds and admits young people on remand as well as sentenced and all females in Queensland. Often there are significant numbers of young people below age 15 who attend compulsory Middle School.

Considerations for success

- Assessment – initial assessment of general academic ability is carried out immediately on admission for all young people. The assessment tools have

been created locally and articulate with outcomes from Certificate I in Vocational Access (literacy and numeracy). This provides a focussed literacy and numeracy ability level and allows us to engage students in literacy and numeracy studies at an appropriate level for success and progress.

- Flexibility – the transient nature of young people attending this school does not allow for simple progress through a course of study. We have developed a flexible response which enables young people to return and reengage with their studies quickly. We are also providing outreach services where possible and advice and support for alternative education providers in the community.
- Celebration of success, engagement and progress – from initial assessment which is built into ILP 201 (Certificate I Vocational Access), students achieve a Statement of Achievement within 2 weeks of admission, this along with certification for workplace health and safety begins a process of recognition and celebration of successful engagement in education. This continues through school generally with weekly Principal's awards for achievement, Citizenship awards each term which celebrate social and emotional development displayed through active citizenship and school reports and exit statements which detail student progress and achievement.
- Empowerment of young people through participative negotiation and decision making – after the initial assessment phase, young people are asked to participate in making a training plan. This includes selecting study areas (literacy and numeracy are accepted as compulsory). The students' timetable is then created and include only those areas of study selected. Students can then negotiate changes to this timetable over time; these negotiations are usually favourable although we have observed recently an acceptance of circumstances where it is impossible to provide for needs immediately.
- A wide range of curriculum, Vocational Education, developmental offerings – from special needs groups of non-readers, through the wide range of socially and emotionally dysfunctional to a small group studying Certificate IV Adult Tertiary Preparation, the range of subject areas and consideration of academic ability and social functioning facilitates engagement and success.

Steve Henderson
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