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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
**Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

**Killyleagh Outdoor Education Centre,
Downpatrick**

Inspected: June 2008

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1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Killyleagh Outdoor Education Centre is situated just outside the village of Killyleagh in County Down, on the western shore of Strangford Lough. The centre's geographical position makes it a very good site for facilitating a wide range of water-based and outdoor and adventurous activities. The centre is managed by the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) and can accommodate 40 users plus staff.

1.2 The centre has a team of two full-time instructors and a warden. A pool of ten part-time instructors and six volunteer instructors support the work of the centre. At the time of the inspection, a part-time member of staff supported the work with the primary school children and two volunteer instructors worked with the post-primary and Scout groups during the evening sessions. In addition, the centre has an effective support team of office and ancillary staff who supply administrative support, manage and maintain equipment and buildings to a high standard, and provide good quality meals.

1.3 The centre aims to provide a safe environment where children and young people experience adventurous and challenging programmes based appropriately on the learning outcomes identified in the Northern Ireland Youth Curriculum. The centre has placed an appropriate focus on developing further the learning opportunities presented by the increasing number of sources of renewable energy within the local environment.

1.4 Figures provided by the centre, show that in the year April 2007 to March 2008, 2,346 young people used the centre and participated in the range of programmes. Over the last three years, there has been a steady increase in the numbers of young people using the centre. Approximately 50% came with school groups and about 47% were young people from the youth sector. The centre also provides leadership training and in-service courses for teachers, full-time and part-time youth workers, as well as courses provided by governing bodies such as the Royal Yachting Association and the Canoe Association of Northern Ireland. In addition, the centre is used for training weekends for sailing and other water-based activities. The majority of the users are from the SEELB area.

2. THE INSPECTION PROCESS

2.1 During one week in June 2008, the inspection team visited three programmes which were identified as being typical of the learning experiences on offer at the centre at this time of the year. The quality of learning and teaching was evaluated in the residential programme, which included a primary school multi-activity course, and two self-programmed groups who used the centre's facilities and equipment during two evening sessions. The inspectors observed ten sessions, met and interviewed the centre's warden, the full-time instructor, the part-time instructor and the part-time volunteer instructors who facilitated the evening programmes, as well as the children, the young people, the teachers, and the leaders participating in the programmes.

3. STRENGTHS OF THE PROVISION

3.1 The ethos of the centre is excellent. Throughout the programmes observed, the staff established very good working relationships with the children, the young people, the teachers and the volunteers. The staff are well qualified and work effectively to build relationships quickly and to get to know well the learners in each group. An appropriate focus on building

trust with the participants is a feature of the work of the centre; the staff work skilfully to provide effective support for the children and young people as they engage in learning in the outdoors. All of the children and young people are encouraged to participate and to set themselves challenging targets. During the inspection, the children and young people were highly motivated and responded enthusiastically to the planned activities.

3.2 The safety of the participants is given a high priority; the instructors encourage the children and young people to take appropriate levels of responsibility for themselves and each other during the activities. In the best practice observed, the children and young people took an active part in the risk assessments prior to each of the activity sessions. The participants are taught how to make themselves aware of any dangers and how to keep themselves safe.

3.3 Clear communication between the centre staff and the visiting school provides a sound basis for effective planning that focuses appropriately on the particular learning needs of the children and young people who participate in the residential programme. Many of the groups have been visiting the centre over the years and the instructors know them well. The roles and responsibilities of visiting teachers and group leaders are clearly identified, and according to the adults communicated effectively, in the documentation that is sent to the school/group before the visit. To build upon the good learning that takes place through the wide range of challenging activities, the participants would benefit from planning that includes elements of learning more clearly linked to their school-based work.

3.4 In the multi-activity programme for primary schools, the visiting staff have a very clear understanding of the learning outcomes expected of the majority of the children. The activities include sailing, kayaking, banana-boating, climbing, scrambling, a low ropes course, and a compass trail. In these sessions the instructors use a range of appropriate teaching approaches to support the children well and to encourage them successfully to improve their learning and skills. In the best practice, the activities are suitably differentiated to allow the children to work at a level that is sufficiently challenging for them as individuals. In addition, some of the planned sessions are adapted to meet more effectively the learning needs of individuals within the visiting group.

3.5 The involvement of volunteer instructors, who have been trained and supported effectively by the centre staff, is an important element of the work of the centre. The volunteers support effectively the range of experiences which are offered to user groups in the evenings and at weekends. The volunteers, observed during the inspection, have developed their skills and qualifications to a high standard; their commitment to promoting further opportunities for the young people to develop positive attitudes, skills and values is to be commended.

3.6 The quality of teaching in all the sessions observed ranged from good to excellent. The instructors use a range of teaching approaches which focus appropriately on developing the participants' social skills and sense of interdependence when working in groups. Effective questioning by the instructors encourages the children and young people to organise their thinking and to extend their responses. A feature of the work is the skilful manner in which the staff offer the participants a balance between setting individual targets and the choice given to complete an activity in which the members of the whole group are involved.

3.7 The warden is dedicated, hard-working and fully committed to the development of all aspects of the life and work of the centre. He has a clear overview of the work of the centre and has facilitated an effective team ethos that works well in the interests of promoting important learning for the children and young people who use the facilities with their schools, youth groups and governing bodies of sport.

3.8 Appropriate arrangements are in place for the warden, instructors, group leaders, children and young people to evaluate the programmes they have experienced. The centre uses a range of sources to gather evidence and make judgements on the quality of their work. The centre staff have identified appropriately the need to use their analysis of the evaluations to develop their planning to promote further improvements in the participants' learning.

3.9 Risk assessments are a high priority for all aspects of the centre's provision; the instructors make effective use of these evaluations to adapt the programmes to suit, for example, tidal changes and prevailing weather conditions. All of the equipment is checked regularly and maintained to a high standard; there is an effective system for recording accidents and incidents of concern.

3.10 A pastoral care and child protection policy, including a useful code of conduct for staff, is in place and kept under review in line with the most recent updates to the SEELB policy guidelines. The centre has identified the need to ensure that all pastoral care and child protection procedures complement the policies operated by the various user groups.

3.11 The quality of the accommodation and resources is good. The range of equipment is suitable and is maintained very well. Appropriate procedures are in place for identifying any deficiencies in the accommodation that might affect the health and safety of staff and programme participants.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The inspection has identified many significant strengths in the work of the centre. The strengths of the provision include:

- the excellent ethos and the effective working relationships within the centre;
- the effective collaborative planning that meets the needs of the learners;
- the good progress made by the children and the young people in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding of themselves in the outdoor environment;
- the positive outcomes in terms of enhanced personal and social development, self-confidence and self-esteem for the majority of the users;
- the extensive knowledge and expertise of the instructors who work effectively as a team to develop the participants' knowledge, skills and understanding; and
- the effective management of the centre by the warden, who works hard to build very good working relationships with the user groups.

4.2 The centre focuses well on the core principles of the youth work curriculum through experiences in the outdoors.

4.3 The quality of provision in this centre is very good. The needs of the children and young people are being well met. The parents and local community can have confidence in the centre's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

No follow-up inspection is required.

ACCOMMODATION

- The showering facilities for the group participants are in need of refurbishment.

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