

YOUTH INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Gortatole Outdoor Education
Centre, Enniskillen

Report of an Inspection
in June 2013



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

CUSTOMER
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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. Context

1.1 Gortatole Outdoor Education Centre (centre) is funded by the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) and is situated near Florencecourt in County Fermanagh approximately two miles from the border with the Republic of Ireland at Blacklion. The centre is set in 65 acres of gardens, pasture land and woods: its proximity to Lower Lough MacNean, forests and caves, makes it an excellent site for an outdoor education centre. The centre is open for 46 weeks of the year including 6 weeks for summer camps for young people and young leaders from across the WELB area.

1.2 The centre is managed by an experienced warden supported by three full-time outdoor education instructors and a bursar. A number of part-time outdoor education instructors and support staff provide additional support in the running of the centre and in the delivery of the programmes.

1.3 The centre has met most of the agreed operational targets that are clearly set out in the annual development plan for 2011-12. While the number of youth groups using the centre has decreased from 107 to 68 over the past three years, the number of schools using the centre has had a small increase over the same period. The centre caters effectively for groups with specific learning needs; approximately one fifth of the user groups have either special or specific educational needs.

2. Focus

The inspection focused on:

- the young people's achievements and standards;
- the quality of the provision; and
- the quality of the leadership and management, including the centre's processes for self-evaluation leading to improvement.

3. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Performance Level	Very Good
Achievements and Standards	Very Good
Provision for Learning	Very Good
Leadership and Management	Very Good

4. Key findings

4.1 Achievements and standards

The quality of the young people's achievements and standards is very good.

4.1.1 The young people display very good levels of motivation and enjoyment. They respond positively to and achieve well in relation to the appropriate, agreed and challenging targets set in a wide range of outdoor activities. They accept responsibility for leadership roles within the set tasks, make confident decisions in a variety of situations and develop well their confidence and self-esteem.

4.1.2 In the sessions observed most of the young people communicate capably with each other in challenging situations and develop well their thinking skills. They demonstrated clearly their ability to work together to solve problems and their behaviour was very good.

4.1.3 The young people showed a clear understanding of the key skills required to work successfully and safely in outdoor settings. In addition, they support and encourage their peers to overcome their fears and make significant progress to achieve their best.

4.1.4 The centre provides very good pathways and progression routes for young people to become leaders in outdoor education. Between three and five hundred young people each year take part in a wide variety of outdoor education courses during the summer months including relevant volunteering opportunities and progression routes for young leaders who wish to develop their outdoor leadership skills.

4.1.5 The centre has successfully piloted the new Leadership Module in Outdoor Education to provide outdoor education instructors with appropriate training and continuing professional development to connect and further develop the common educational objectives between the formal and non-formal curriculum.

4.2 Provision for learning

The quality of the provision for learning is very good.

4.2.1 The quality of the sessions observed ranged from outstanding to very good, with one quarter outstanding. The sessions are well-planned; there is a very good balance between challenge and support for the young people and with clear links to the intended learning outcomes.

4.2.2 The staff use their considerable experience and local knowledge to very good effect to engage and motivate the young people; they have realistic expectations in terms of the young people's behaviour, skills and knowledge. Detailed risk assessment and ongoing risk management ensures that young people are taught appropriately how to keep themselves safe.

4.2.3 A particular strength of the centre is the complementary nature of the skills and abilities within the teams of instructors that is used to very good effect to meet the wide range and needs of the user groups. The staff work collegially to develop potential amongst all users, in particular they focus on working with young people to develop positive attitudes about themselves and others, in a rich and safe learning environment.

4.2.4 The quality of the pastoral care for the young people who attend the centre is outstanding. The highly experienced enthusiastic and skilled instructors establish very quickly excellent working relationships with teachers, classroom assistants, youth workers, and the young people. The seamless integration of the pastoral care and learning is a significant strength of the centre. The centre's mission statement to allow, "Human potential to blossom through the provision of high quality learning and development opportunities, using a range of environments", is evident in the work of the staff at Gortatole.

4.2.5 The young people reported that they feel safe and secure in the centre and outdoor learning environments; they are reminded about their safety and well being during all of the sessions. They also reported that they know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

4.3. Leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is very good.

4.3.1 There is a commitment to quality and improvement at all levels. The action planning process is embedded well in the work of the centre; the annual action plan is monitored effectively through regular review meetings between the warden and deputy head of youth service and the comprehensive monthly monitoring reports to the WELB.

4.3.2 The warden manages successfully the day-to-day running of the centre; he uses his considerable experience and expertise to lead the staff team effectively to ensure that the programme offer is of the highest quality for the young people. All of the staff work well together to meet the targets agreed in the annual action plan. There is a comprehensive, effective risk management strategy in place which is evident in the outworking of the activities and programmes provided.

4.3.3 There is a systematic approach to quality assurance and the outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation inform well programme planning, safe practice and decision making. The staff team make good use of plenary sessions to inform and guide future programmes. Effective and efficient use is made of the centre's resources.

4.3.4 Feedback from user groups indicates a very high level of satisfaction with the staff, activities and programmes provided by the centre.

4.3.5 On the basis of the evidence available during the inspection, the centre has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education. However, the following issue needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency: all staff require updated training in the safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

5. Conclusion

5.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by Gortatole Outdoor Education Centre is very good. The centre is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Number of Schools using the OE Centre

Year	Controlled Primary	Maintained Primary	Misc	Controlled Secondary	Maintained Secondary	Misc	Total
2009-10	14	10	2	22	31	2	81
2010-11	13	11	1	24	34	2	85
2011-12	14	11	2	21	36	12	96

Table 2: Number of Youth Organisations using the OE Centre

Year	Controlled	Voluntary	Uniform	Misc	Total
2009-10	71	11	13	12	107
2010-11	68	9	9	12	98
2011-12	40	13	5	10	68

Table 3: Staff

	Male	Female	Total
Number of voluntary staff	13	9	22
Number of part-time/casual staff	9	2	11
Number of part-time instructors (over 12 hours)	0	0	0
Number of full-time instructors	3	0	3
Other staff <i>Ancillary</i>	1	11	12

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