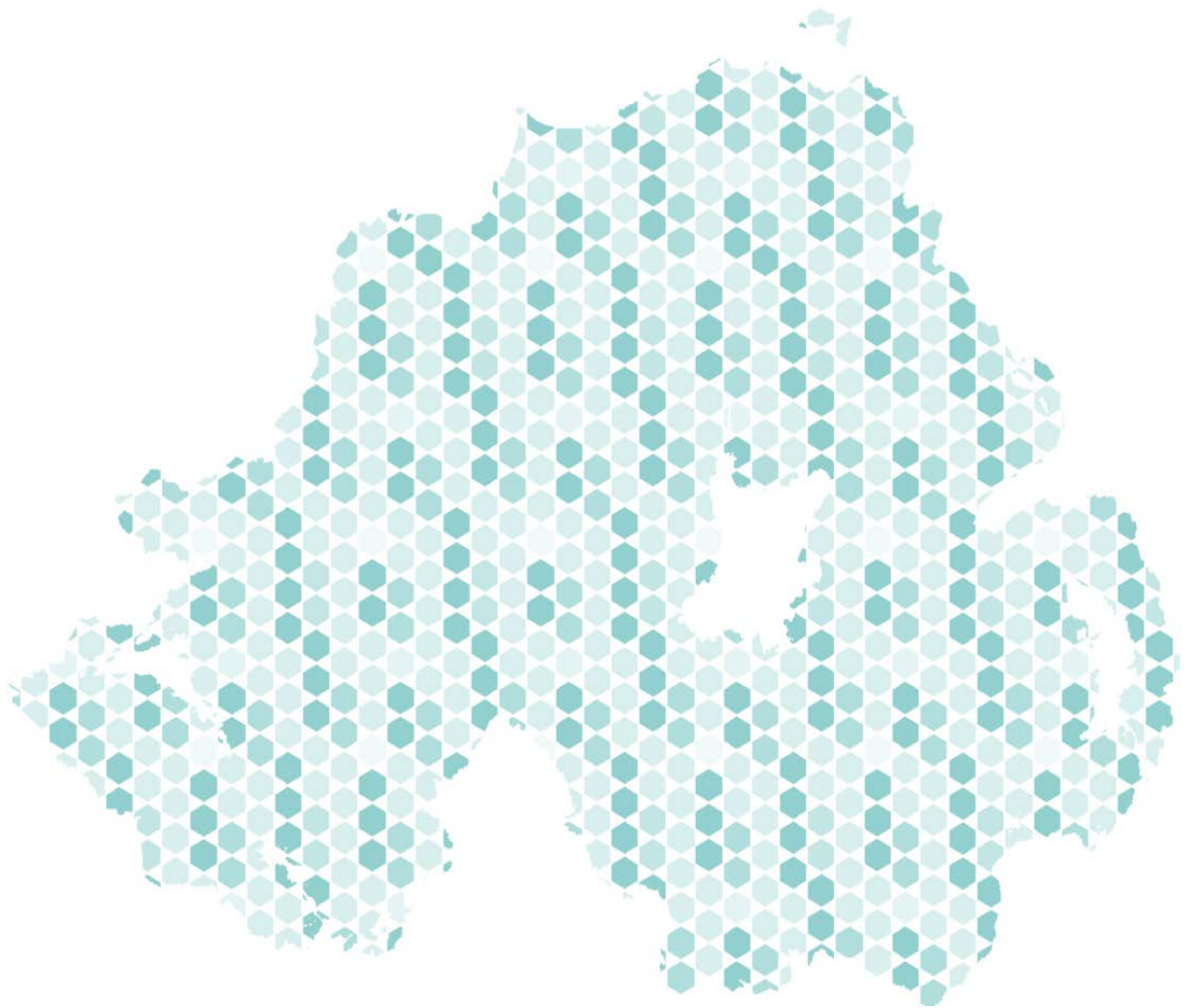


# YOUTH INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

The Boys' Brigade, Northern  
Ireland District

Report of an inspection in  
November 2014

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:

PERFORMANCE LEVEL
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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## 1. Focus of inspection

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 processes for self-evaluation leading to improvement.

## 2. Context

The Boys' Brigade (Northern Ireland District) is a uniformed organisation, founded in 1883, for young people aged from 5 to 18 years, of any faith, and background. The Brigade Executive, which meets in England, is the governing body for The Boys' Brigade in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and the Republic of Ireland.

The Boys' Brigade, as an inter-denominational organisation, has its main object as "*The advancement of Christ's Kingdom among boys and the promotion of habits of obedience, reverence, discipline, self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness*".

In March 2014, The Boys' Brigade (Northern Ireland District) headquarters moved to new premises in Newport, Hillsborough. The Regional Director for Northern Ireland is in post six years and is supported by a team of full-time staff and a Northern Ireland District Executive Committee.

A number of key financial and administrative functions are centralised within the UK headquarters, including safeguarding. The companies are established within church settings and as such adhere to the policies and procedures of their respective churches. In Northern Ireland, the organisation covers three specific geographical areas: Northern, Central and Southern and has thirteen battalions.

In Northern Ireland, the membership has 294 regional companies, consisting of approximately 16,000 boys and 2,500 leaders. There are four main sections and age groups:

- Anchor Boys - age 5 to 8 years
- Junior Section - age 8 to 11 years
- Company Section - age 11 to 15 years
- Seniors - age 15 to 18 years

## 3. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Very good</b>
<b>Achievements and standards</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Provision</b>	<b>Very good</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Very good</b>

#### **4. Achievements and standards**

- The high numbers of young people and their participation in purposeful programmes and training within The Boys' Brigade is outstanding. A particular strength is the progression into leadership roles by the young people. Across the various age groups, the young people aspire to become future leaders, and in the senior and company sections, they enthusiastically accept opportunities to assume leadership roles and responsibilities.
- The young people recognise very clearly their progress through the wide range of badge work and awards. In the last year, over 700 young people, and leaders, achieved a recognised award, badge or training programme including, the King George VI training programme, the Queen's Badge, and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. These achievements are celebrated well by the young people, their leaders and their families.
- In discussions with the young people involved in the King George VI and Queen's Badge programmes, they articulated clearly how they have benefitted from their involvement in The Boys' Brigade. They spoke of how they can develop and grow their faith, and the positive influence of The Boys' Brigade from young Anchor Boys to their present leadership positions. These young people have a sound understanding of the contribution which they make to other young people and are very proud of their active participation in the organisation.
- The young leaders understand that the skills they are learning in The Boys' Brigade are transferable; and in addition, they recognise the value of these skills in their chosen careers, such as software programming, teaching, and economics. These transferable skills, such as managing people, contribute to and enhance their training, careers and employability pathways.
- The young people have fun and enjoy their participation in a variety of programmes, through which they develop personally, socially and spiritually. In activities, such as their drill practice and Bible study, they demonstrate excellent listening skills, self-confidence and concentration. Additional programmes, such as animation and history projects, develop their creativity, imagination and initiative.
- The young people are inclusive and understand well the needs of their peers, who often come from differing denominational, educational and socio-economic backgrounds. In an interview with a small number of the young people, who had taken part in the most recent Community Relations Equity and Diversity (CRED) activities, they reported a deeper understanding of the different cultures in Northern Ireland, and welcomed the opportunity to build friendships with others from different backgrounds. Over the last two years, five hundred young men have completed successfully their Queen's Badge, which includes developing their skills, attitudes and behaviours in CRED programmes.
- Through their on-going charitable programmes, the young people recognise the enjoyment of giving to others, and have compassion and sensitivity towards those they understand to be in need. Furthermore, from a young age they are aware of their responsibilities as global citizens, and this is exemplified in their study visits abroad and extensive contribution through charitable fundraising for developing countries.

## 5. Provision

- All of the sessions observed were good to outstanding, with most very good or better. In the most effective practice, there is very good organisation from the beginning to the end of the sessions. The planning and organisation of activities at unit level is very good and is well thought through, taking account of the ages and interests of the young people. Typically, a session involves a mixture of fun activities, reflection and drill. Where drills are used, there is learning beyond traditional drill skills, with a focus on listening skills and enjoyment.
- The leaders use structured and purposeful activities effectively to work with those young people who have challenging behaviours; the settling activities focus the young people, and as a consequence, the young people participate attentively throughout the sessions.
- The leaders and officers in the units have clear roles and understand their responsibilities. They are aware of, and use appropriately, family connections to build a strong sense of community and belonging, which the young people value and respond to positively.
- The Boys' Brigade provides challenging and innovative training programmes that are contemporary and adapted to meet the needs of the young people. There is an excellent range of courses and programmes provided at regional and battalion levels. Both the leaders and the young people particularly value the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and align much of this programme to the internal Boys' Brigade training courses.
- Residential training is given a high priority; the young people and volunteers highlight the importance of a safe learning environment away from home, where they develop their leadership skills, while building teamwork and independent living skills.
- The innovative 'Code Academy' is impacting significantly on the young people in the senior and company sections. This information technology programme in coding, which is provided in conjunction with the University of Ulster, is externally accredited and enhances the employability and further education opportunities for the young people. The first pilot cohort of 18 has completed successfully the course, with an overall target of 250 young people due to complete the programme within the next three years.
- The recent Company Development Scheme provides very good information and advice for companies and is encouraging better planning for sessions, reflective practice and review. The organisation recognises appropriately the need to develop this scheme further across all of the units.
- The quality of the pastoral care demonstrates clearly that the staff lead by example; they work collectively to help the young people identify their strengths and talents to reach their full potential. The young people speak positively about their long-lasting friendships, the high levels of care and support, and the commitment of the volunteers. There is mutual respect among the leaders and young people, nurturing an excellent climate for learning and personal development.

## 6. Leadership and management

- The leadership of The Boys' Brigade (Northern Ireland District) has achieved high standards of youth provision through their effective leadership and management. They set realistic expectations and demonstrate a clear commitment to quality improvement at all levels. There are sound organisational values, which are well embedded in their strategic vision and understood throughout the organisation. In the 'Priority Areas for Work' document, the organisation has reflected accurately what they hope to achieve; however, to improve further their self-evaluation, the targets and outcomes anticipated for the young people need to be more detailed and measurable.
- The newly established full-time staff team at Newport is enthusiastic about its respective responsibilities and is well supported and led by the senior management. Staff are encouraged and supported to be innovative and creative in the development of new programmes. The organisation has developed an exemplary range of resources to support volunteers, including an excellent range of factual leaflets, which provide comprehensive information on medical conditions, and the learning needs of young people.
- Across The Boys' Brigade, the leaders at all levels use their wide range of skills and expertise to deliver sound curricular provision, well matched to the needs of the young people. They are excellent role models, who inspire and motivate the young people. The long-standing commitment of volunteers across the companies and in the various representative committees, demonstrates their outstanding dedication, service and example.
- The investment in the training and development of staff and volunteers is given a high priority and is very well planned. The training for volunteer leaders is flexible, well-conceived and enhances their skills when working with young people. The annual section conferences support and inform the planning and delivery of programmes at unit level. This year's junior section conference was led very effectively by experienced staff, who shared new ideas and programmes for the section leaders to take back to their individual units.
- There are very good levels of representation and collegiality at battalion and district levels; and the breadth of leadership experiences and opportunities for progression at both local and national level are extensive. The units and battalions have high levels of independence to respond effectively to the needs of their members in local areas. Increasingly, the battalions collaborate, support one another and share resources to benefit the overall organisation. In addition, the organisation has established strategic, relevant relationships with other uniformed organisations and also across the wider youth sector.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection The Boys' Brigade (Northern Ireland District) has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children and young people. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education, but the following area needs to be addressed: there is a need for greater clarity and consistency in the policies and procedures for safeguarding in The Boys' Brigade, in particular, in relation to reporting arrangements.

## **7. Conclusion**

In the areas inspected, the quality of the overall provision for the young people is very good. The Boys' Brigade (Northern Ireland District) is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the young people; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.



**Table 1: Total Membership**

Section	Anchor Boys 5-8		Junior 8-11		Company/ Senior 11-18		Volunteers 18-24	Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female		
2011/12	6317	-	4224	-	5071	-		15612
2012/13	6351	-	4235	-	4973	-		15559
2013/14	6369	-	4317	-	4808	-		15494
current							350	

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