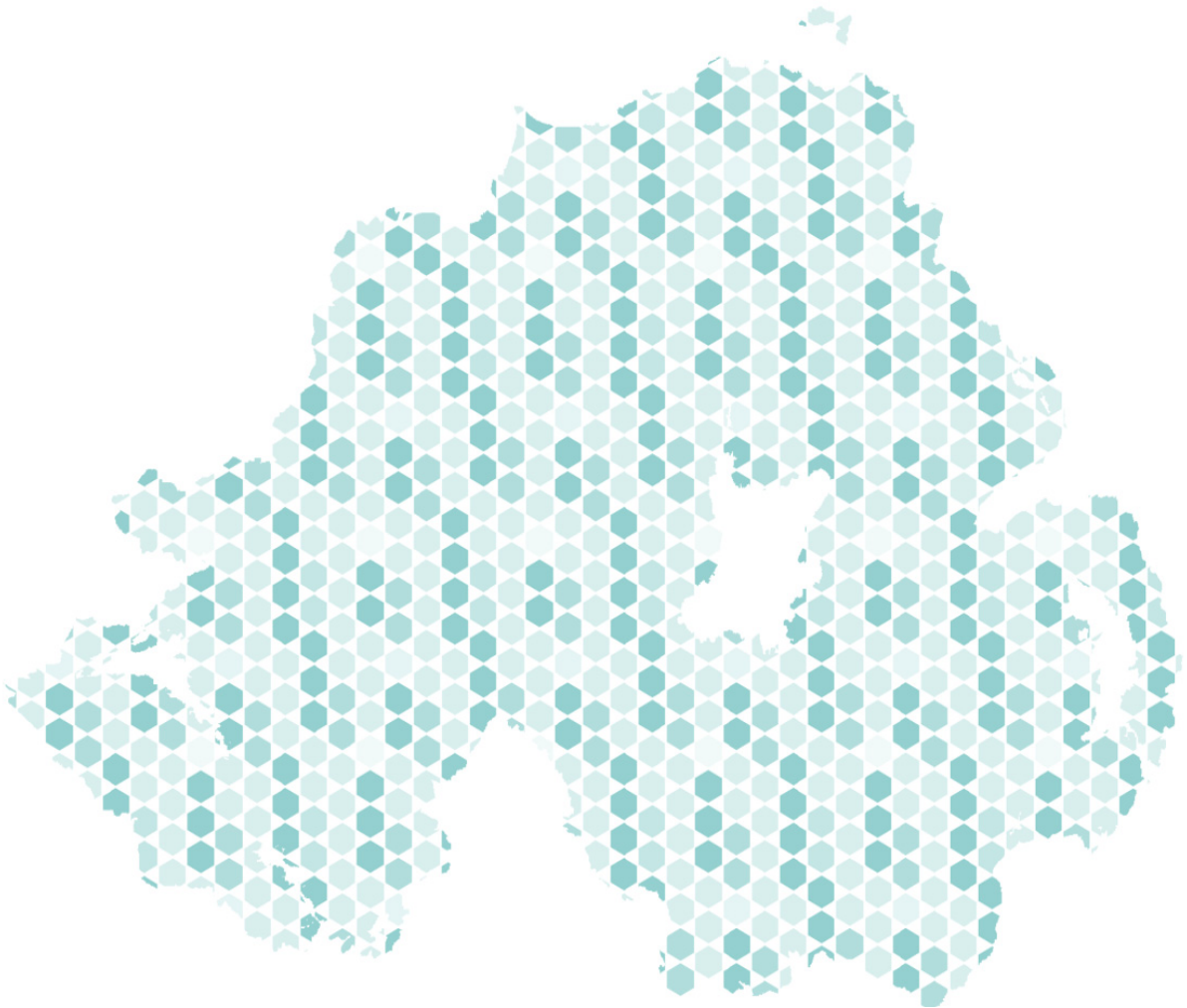


YOUTH INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Ardnabannon Outdoor
Education Centre, Castlewellan

Report of an Inspection
in June 2010

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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, the Inspectorate relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Ardnabannon Outdoor Education Centre (OEC) is managed by the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB), and is situated near Castlewellan in County Down. The centre was opened in 1967 and is a large country house, set in ten acres of its own grounds. On several occasions, most recently in 2005, the centre was refurbished to extend and improve the accommodation and conference facilities. It now offers accommodation for 100 young people and adults.

1.2 At weekends and over the summer period, the majority of young people attend with the youth service; almost all of the use during the week is by schools. The young people participate in a range of activities, including: rock climbing, orienteering, mountaineering, bouldering, canoeing, hill-walking, initiative games and field studies.

1.3 In the financial year 2009-2010, the attendance figures indicate that two-thirds of the young people, attending the centre were from school groups. The majority of the 168 user groups were from the SEELB area. In 2009-2010, figures provided by the centre indicate that 3,092 of the young people were attending with primary and post-primary schools, and 1,464 were youth service participants (Appendix 1). Figures for the last three years show that an increasing number of the user groups are returning to Ardnabannon. (Appendix 2) During the inspection period eight groups used the centre; all but one had been before and most had been attending for a number of years.

1.4 In the 2009/10 financial year, the centre received £397,500 from the SEELB youth service budget, which is its primary source of funding. However, the centre needs to generate significant additional income each year to meet its overall expenditure. In the last financial year, the centre generated £350,000 of income from user groups.

1.5 The centre is managed by a senior warden, assisted by a deputy warden and a bursar, who, collectively have responsibility for managing the daily operation of the programmes. There is a total of 25 staff, including, six full-time outdoor education instructors, support staff, and three part-time instructors. The full-time instructional staff take responsibility for co-ordinating and managing the individual programmes on a weekly rotational basis.

1.6 The centre provides a number of outdoor training courses to support adults working with young people. During the last year, 101 adults successfully completed accredited programmes facilitated by the centre staff. (Appendix 3)

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The inspection team observed 16 sessions of outdoor education instruction. The team also observed briefings, plenary sessions, evening activities and evaluation sessions. In addition, discussions were held with the senior and deputy wardens, the full-time instructors, a small number of the part-time instructors, the centre support staff, visiting staff and a group of primary 6 pupils. During the inspection, the team examined a range of documentation, including, policies, risk assessments and operational plans.

3. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

3.1 The senior warden has overall management responsibility for outdoor education in the SEELB. In addition to Ardnabannon, he manages Killyleagh OEC and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme within the SEELB. He has a clear strategic vision to ensure the future sustainability and the improvement of outdoor education across the SEELB, through a

process of highly efficient management, integrated working practices and collaborative development planning. The senior warden has established the priorities for the centre and has identified appropriately the need to involve all of the staff in a process of development planning, taking account of their extensive professional expertise.

3.2 The senior warden is supported well by the deputy warden, who manages the instructional staff team very effectively. The wardens are hard-working and promote very good relationships with user groups, to ensure that the programmes offer the highest quality experiences and enjoyment for the young people.

3.3 The instructors demonstrate a high level of responsibility for the visiting groups; they oversee the preparation and programme of activities planned for the young people. The staff team is highly qualified and there are good working relationships among all of the staff. Each instructor, in his or her role as weekly co-ordinator oversees operational matters diligently; meets the individual needs of the groups effectively; and facilitates an evaluative discussion with the young people at the end of their stay. The staff should, however, give greater attention to recording the evaluative discussions and the learning outcomes of the young people, to inform better future planning.

3.4 At the end of each programme, the groups complete an evaluation form and return it to the centre. The evaluation forms, from the various user groups over the past four years, indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the centre staff, the programme planning and delivery. It is clear from the evaluations that the programmes are effectively meeting the needs of the various user groups. However, the staff team require further professional development to inform and support their awareness of the principles underpinning the revised curriculum for schools.

3.5 The senior warden has good links with a range of external organisations, including the Mourne Recreational Forum. Such useful links ensure that the senior warden acts as an advocate of the centre's commitment to environmental protection and maintains good relationships with local landowners.

4. QUALITY OF PROVISION

4.1 The centre has an inclusive, caring and welcoming ethos. The staff work together effectively to promote and maintain a well-organised, supportive, and stimulating environment for learning. There is a strong sense of collegiality and team spirit among the centre staff, including the excellent support staff, who welcome and look after the hospitality needs of the visitors.

4.2 The enthusiastic, professional and highly motivated instructors establish effective working relationships quickly with the young people, teachers and youth workers, in order to gain maximum benefit from the visit to the centre. The instructors encourage the young people consistently to take responsibility for themselves and for others. The tasks are well-paced and differentiated to suit all levels of ability. The teachers and youth leaders, accompanying the groups during the inspection period, speak very highly of the quality of the instruction and of the very good learning they observe with the young people.

4.3 In the sessions observed, the quality of the instruction ranged from good to outstanding. The sessions are well facilitated and the instructors take account of the age, experience and ability of all of the young people. They provide very good levels of individual support to those students requiring extra help, and also to those young people with

additional learning needs. The programmes are inclusive and matched well to the requirements of the visiting groups. In the most effective practice, skilful questioning is used to guide and to challenge the young people during the activities. At the start of the sessions, the instructors outline clearly the intended learning outcomes of the activity, and reflect with the young people on the progression of their learning at the end.

4.4 In the post-primary geography river study, the instructors connect the learning to the pupils' school-based work. There is evidence of good co-operation between the centre staff and the school, both prior to, and during their visit. The young people gather data for their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) geography coursework, and they work effectively in their groups, supporting one another throughout the session. There are very good opportunities for them to extend a range of literacy, numeracy, and information communication technology (ICT) skills.

4.5 In a discussion with a group of young people from one of the visiting schools, they talked enthusiastically about their stay and their enjoyment of the residential experience. They felt safe and well looked after at Ardnabannon, and spoke highly of the friendly and supportive instructional and support staff.

4.6 A range of very good quality policies guides and supports the pastoral care provision within the centre. The policies are kept under review, and complement the SEELB policy guidelines. The centre has very good, comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

4.7 The safety of the young people is consistently given a high priority. The instructors make effective use of the daily briefings; they adapt the activities to take account of staff availability, the weather conditions and the ability levels of the groups. Equipment is checked regularly and maintained to a high standard. The instructors help the young people to develop the appropriate skills for, and attitudes to the activities, and encourage them to keep themselves and others safe. The young people are also consistently made aware of potential hazards.

4.8 The quality of the accommodation is good; however, following feedback from the young people, there is a need to review and improve some aspects of the dormitory accommodation.

5. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

5.1 The young people observed during the period of the inspection are clearly developing very good personal and social skills. They learn to communicate with one another in challenging situations, and to recognise the importance of following instructions closely. In all of the activities, they make very good use of their thinking skills and demonstrate clearly their ability to solve problems and to work effectively in teams. In the sessions using initiative games, the young people support one another to complete a group task within a challenging timescale. The young people respond well to the challenge, and they use creative thinking approaches to explore alternative strategies to complete the task. In the plenary session, they reflect on and evaluate their learning, and discuss how they used their delegated roles successfully during the task.

5.2 Almost all of the young people demonstrated very good progression in their skills and abilities in the activities. Learning is connected, developed and built upon in subsequent activities. In the canoeing activity, the initial part of the course is planned to develop basic techniques. After mastering these skills, the young people are better prepared to cope with the more difficult task of paddling back to base against the wind. The young people demonstrated how testing out and improving their skills helps them to cope much more effectively with more challenging and difficult conditions.

5.3 The young people are enthusiastic participants in all of the activities and they demonstrate a willingness to learn and to improve. For a small number of the young people, activities such as rock climbing are very challenging. However, most of them persist and demonstrate a good level of resilience to overcome their fears and to achieve their targets. The young people have consistently high expectations of themselves, and they encourage each other to try new experiences. Without exception, the young people readily accept the rules and boundaries for behaviour and demonstrate very good standards of self discipline. They respond positively to the instructors, engage fully and thoroughly enjoy the very good range of appropriate activities.

6. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

6.1 The strengths of the centre include:

- the very effective and efficient management of the centre by the senior and deputy wardens;
- the highly professional, experienced staff and the quality of instruction observed, which ranged from good to outstanding;
- the high level of awareness of, and the very good focus on, inclusion, which ensures that all of the young people are supported well, and encouraged to participate to their full potential;
- the wide range of appropriately challenging age-related activities, which engage and motivate the young people;
- the welcoming, friendly and inclusive ethos of the centre, and the effective working relationships within the centre, and between the staff and the visiting groups; and
- the very good achievements and standards attained by the young people, and the clear progression in the development of their knowledge, understanding, social skills and personal development.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this organisation is very good. The organisation is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

Total number of young people attending the centre

Year	Youth	Primary School	Post Primary School	Adults
2007/08	1698	1742	1169	345
2008/09	1740	2030	1260	256
2009/10	1464	1971	1122	194

Attendance of user groups

Year	Youth	Primary School	Post Primary School
2007/08	69	54	47
2008/09	76	50	51
2009/10	71	53	44

Percentage of returning groups

Year	Youth	Primary School	Post Primary School
2007/08	79%	77%	79%
2008/09	62%	87%	87%
2009/10	86%	85%	95%

Adult accredited programmes

Course	Adults achieving
Duke of Edinburgh assessor award	30
First Aid	28
Hill-walking levels 1 and 2	16
Canoeing levels 1 and 2	8
Orienteering	19

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