



*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

Killowen Outdoor Education Centre Rostrevor

Inspected: May 2009

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1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Killowen Outdoor Education Centre, managed by the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB), is situated just outside Rostrevor in County Down. It began as a sailing centre in 1975 but moved to the present site in June 1982. The location on the shores of Carlingford Lough and adjacent to forest parks makes it suitable for accessing outdoor activities. The centre offers accommodation for 48 young people and eight leaders; a new extension is at an advanced planning stage.

1.2 The centre is managed by a warden, supported by four full-time outdoor education instructors, one field studies instructor and six part-time outdoor education instructors. A team of office and other staff provide effective additional support and maintain the equipment and buildings to a high standard.

1.3 The vision of the SELB outdoor education service is 'to provide quality learning experiences in the outdoor environment for all young people in the board area'. Following collaboration between the Western Education and Library Board and the SELB, officers from both boards are working on a new outdoor education development plan.

1.4 The centre is funded from the SELB youth service budget but needs to generate significant income each year to meet overall budget requirements set by the SELB. In the last financial year the centre has exceeded the budget targets set. A significant proportion of the income is generated through the partnership with the Young Enterprise Scheme Key Programme.

1.5 Figures provided by the centre show that, in 2007-2008, 4,806 young people used the centre and participated in a wide range of activities, including sailing, rock climbing, abseiling, canoeing, hill walking and field studies. In 2008-2009 the attendance figures indicate a small increase from the previous year, which is slightly down on the figures presented for 2006-2007.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The inspection team visited four different programmes, observing seven sessions and approximately 17 hours of outdoor education instruction. The activities observed included a field study with a group of post-primary pupils, hill walking, canoeing, kayaking, bush craft and sailing. In addition, the team held meetings with the senior youth officer, the warden, all of the full-time instructors and a small number of the part-time instructors and the support staff. They also examined a wide range of relevant documentation.

3. QUALITY OF PROVISION

3.1 The ethos of the centre is good. The hard-working staff establish effective working relationships with the leaders and the young people who attend the centre. The young people respond positively to the instructors and enjoy the activities provided.

3.2 In the last three years over 35 young people have progressed from activity taster sessions to leadership roles as voluntary instructors who support the sailing activities. Their progression and development is integral to the work of the centre. The young people have all completed successfully recognised and accredited training from the Royal Yachting Association and are deployed extensively during the summer programme. The centre should give consideration to extending the successful voluntary instructor scheme to other outdoor activities.

3.3 In the majority of the sessions observed, the quality of the instruction was good or better. The sessions were well planned and there was a clear focus to the practical outcomes for the young people. Appropriately, the instructors reinforced the learning points at the end of almost all of the sessions. The staff have identified the need to develop further the links between outdoor education instruction and the youth work curriculum. For example, there is a need for more effective evaluation of programmes as demonstrated in the curriculum and programme development cycle in 'Youth Work: A Model for Effective Practice'.

3.4 The long-standing link with the Young Enterprise Scheme Key Programme is a good example of effective co-operation between the centre and post-primary schools to the benefit of the learners. For ten years the Young Enterprise Scheme has organised the Key Programme to develop entrepreneurial skills for young people. There are four Key Programmes between September and May each year. Each programme is made up of 12 young people from three different schools: one controlled, one maintained and a school from the Republic of Ireland. The centre instructors provide a range of relevant outdoor activities to support the programme. In the sessions observed the instructors took into account the differing levels of need and ability of the young people and were flexible in their strategies to promote their personal and social development.

3.5 In the field study provided for a post-primary school, effective communication and planning between the centre staff and the visiting school focused appropriately on the learning needs of the pupils. The planning included elements of learning clearly linked to the pupils' school-based work. The instructor used a range of suitable approaches to motivate and engage the pupils, including the effective use of practical equipment. The pupils worked well in groups, sharing their ideas and developing further their understanding of the data they were gathering. In addition, the activities were suitably differentiated to allow all of the pupils to improve their learning and to develop their skills.

3.6 The centre has good links with a range of local organisations, including heritage, environmental and community groups, such as Carlingford Sailing Club. The staff use a meteorological office station well to promote learning, particularly in sailing. The centre has also developed effective links with ENABLE NI, assisting in the production of a DVD outlining very good examples of inclusion.

3.7 The safety of the young people is given a high priority. The designated officer from the SELB carries out a detailed risk management assessment in conjunction with the centre staff. In the sessions observed, the instructors encouraged the young people to take responsibility for themselves. At the beginning of sessions the instructors helped the young people to identify potential hazards.

3.8 The quality of the accommodation is satisfactory; the SELB has identified appropriately the need to refurbish the dormitory blocks. The range of equipment is suitable and is maintained well.

3.9 The centre has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education and includes the training for the designated instructors provided by the child protection officer from the SELB. The child protection policy also includes, appropriately, a code of conduct for all staff. The following areas need to be addressed: the centre needs to ensure that the parents of the voluntary instructors are aware of the centre's child protection policy and how to make a complaint. In addition, the centre needs to make the parents of other young people who make direct use of the centre, for example during the summer programmes, aware of the child protection policy.

3.10 The warden manages the centre efficiently. He promotes good working relationships among the staff; the harmonious team which has been created works effectively with the user groups. The recently introduced head of group meetings between the warden, the executive administration officer, the head of kitchen and the store manager have appropriately become more regular and formal. Full staff meetings including all of the instructors are less regular; there is a need to ensure that these meetings are more frequent and have a greater focus on the areas for development outlined in the agreed action plans.

3.11 The senior youth officer has overall management responsibility for outdoor education in the SELB. He receives monthly and annual reports from the warden that include the numbers using the centre and a financial statement. The reports are detailed and appropriately include important data from each programme. However, there is a need to analyse the range of data, including individual session evaluations, to inform future practice. It is appropriate that the senior youth officer has recognised the need for a common outdoor education plan across the two ELBs. There is a need to ensure that the plan will include effective quality assurance of the users' experiences during their stay at the centre.

4. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 The strengths of the centre include:

- the good quality of the experiences that take appropriate account of the young people's interests, needs and aspirations;
- the good quality of the instruction observed during the inspection;
- the inclusive ethos of the centre;
- the very good progression to leadership roles for a minority of the young people;
- the positive response and the enjoyment of the young people observed during the activity sessions; and
- the good quality of the external links with relevant partners and stakeholders.

4.2 As areas for improvement, the inspection has identified the need for:

- further training for the instructors to focus more effectively on developing the links between outdoor education and the youth work curriculum; and
- the further development of the self-evaluation process, including action planning, to inform future practice.

5. **CONCLUSION**

5.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this centre is good. The centre has important strengths in most of its outdoor education provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the centre has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the centre's progress on the areas for improvement.

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