

YOUTH INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Mountcollyer Youth Centre,
Belfast

Report of an Inspection in
November 2015



Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on achievement and standards, on provision for learning and on leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the organisation:

The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will continue to monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will continue to monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a follow-up inspection in 12-18 months.
The organisation needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress. There will be a follow-up inspection in 12-18 months.

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1. Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on:

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

2. Context

Mountcollyer Youth Centre is a full-time youth centre situated in Belfast on the Limestone Road. The centre is located in the grounds of Currie Primary School and is managed by the Education Authority. The staff of the Education Authority are supported by a local advisory committee, which includes representation from the young people, parents, local youth workers and the Principal of Currie Primary School. Two years ago, the Education Authority invested significant funding from the Department of Education to change the centre to full-time status and it now employs a full-time youth worker, and 10 voluntary and part-time paid staff. The funding for the continuation of the full-time provision is to be reviewed in March 2016.

The centre is open six evenings each week, and the range of provision includes: drop-in sessions; extended opening hours on weekend evenings; community relations programmes and residential programmes with other local youth groups.

According to information supplied by the organisation, there were 92 young people registered last year; approximately 53% were in the 4-9 years age range. At the time of the inspection, 111 young people had registered for the current year. The overall membership figure for the centre has increased since the centre was made full-time; however, the attendance figures are still too low, particularly for senior members.

3. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Achievements and standards	Good
Provision for learning	Good
Leadership and management	Good

4. Achievements and standards

The young people value the range of programmes which the staff provide and enjoy good relationships with one another. The youth centre is a welcoming, safe and secure environment for the young people, in an area which is still experiencing difficult community tensions.

The young people, their families and the local community benefit from the centre's focus on community relations work. While several of the planned programmes for the centre struggled to engage and retain young people in group work, the young people engage willingly in, and commit more fully to, those programmes where they learn and socialise with young people from a different community background.

The inclusive ethos in the centre is characterised by programmes such as; 'Welcome to My World', 'Our Space' and 'Friends Forever'¹. These innovative and challenging programmes are creative and flexible to meet the changing needs and interests of the young people. Through such programmes, the young people are learning about prejudice, sectarianism and are developing close friendships with other young people from differing religious and ethnic backgrounds. In group work, the older members discuss issues pertinent to their lives and to the improvement of their community. Furthermore, the young people are supportive of one another when they have personal and family issues. In discussions with their peers and youth workers, they are mature in their reflections and sensitive to the views and opinions of others.

A key focus for the centre is to 'widen the horizons' of the young people. In discussions with the Inspectorate, the young people talked enthusiastically about their learning through challenging community relations programmes, such as recent group visits to New Orleans, India and South Africa. The young people, who participated in these programmes, highlighted their enhanced leadership and social skills, which they recognise benefit their academic progress in school. In addition, the older members are completing successfully a range of appropriate accredited and non-accredited courses to support them in their volunteering and leadership roles.

Through the well-organised, recreational programmes, the younger members are developing useful new skills and they particularly enjoy cookery and arts and crafts. Most of the young people participated in these activities; however, a small number were too easily distracted and unsettled when the other young people were trying to concentrate on their task or discussions.

5. Provision for learning

The quality of the youth work sessions observed ranged from very good to practice which had important areas for improvement; a majority of the sessions were evaluated as good. In the best practice, the staff facilitate effective group work, which interests, engages and progresses the young people in their learning. While the staff prepare well for their sessions and are clear about their roles and responsibilities, in the less effective practice, there is a need for the staff to develop a greater understanding about the pace of the group work, and to focus their planning and evaluation more sharply on the learning outcomes for the young people.

The 'Youth Work in the Community'² programme, which is delivered by the North Belfast Area Project to the older members, gives the young people clear progression routes into leadership roles and enhances their future career and employment opportunities. These young people are able to articulate clearly the skills which they have learnt and how they will use the experiences to progress to the next stage of their learning.

¹ 'Welcome to My World', 'Our Space' and 'Friends Forever' are community relations and inclusion programmes, which receive external funding and are in delivered partnership with other local youth organisations.

² Youth Work in the Community is a young leaders' programme facilitated by the Education Authority staff of the North Belfast Area Project.

There is an appropriate breadth and balance of recreational, and group work programmes available every night for the young people. The current provision for young people during the day is too limited, with only one session delivered in a local post-primary school. The school values highly this work, recognises the benefits to their pupils in their learning and is keen to develop further the partnership with the youth service. The centre staff have identified appropriately that they need to develop further their outreach work and use more effectively their links to local schools and the community to attract greater numbers of young people to the centre.

The quality of the arrangements for care, guidance and support within the centre is good. The young people informed the inspection team that they feel safe in the centre and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety and well-being. The very good relationships between the staff and the young people are built on mutual respect and provide a sound foundation to progress the personal and social development of the young people. The young people respond well to the ethos of inclusion which permeates all of the work of the centre and are comfortable in one another's company, irrespective of their backgrounds.

The parents, who spoke to the inspection team, raised concerns about the recent withdrawal by the Education Authority of the evening programme for the 6 to 8 year olds. They stated that the centre provides a much needed safe space for their young people; they value highly the supportive staff and recognise the benefits to their young people participating in the range of programmes.

6. Leadership and management

The advisory committee represents well the local community and key stakeholders, and with the Education Authority have a clear focus on achieving the best for the young people. They have a well-informed understanding of the needs of the young people and their families, and are highly supportive of the centre staff. There is a need for the advisory committee and the Education Authority to develop further their agreed vision for the future development of the centre. A particular strength is the representation of the young people on this committee, who are valued for their opinions, insight and contribution.

The managers of the centre have an extensive range of strategic partnerships, which benefits the experiences for the young people. The partnerships with local schools and the North Belfast Area Project are mutually valued and provide a sound foundation, which should be further built upon by the centre to raise the aspirations of the young people in this area and to help them to address barriers to their educational progression.

There are well-established, collegial working relationships among the staff team; they work well together to continuously improve the quality of the experiences for the young people. They are well deployed and lead competently their own projects. The staff have recently engaged in a quality assurance process, to set, agree and plan to develop further the work of the centre, which is in the early stages of development, but is reflective, honest and demonstrates evidence of their commitment to continuing to grow and progress the centre.

All of the staff are involved in planning and evaluating their own programmes, and have a range of talents and skills, which they use effectively to design and deliver an innovative and interesting curriculum. Some of the centre's programmes are not included in the unit development plan; for example, the work with a local post-primary school. The planning would benefit from a stronger focus on the partnerships with local schools and youth providers, such as the North Belfast Area Project, and more detailed, measurable targets about the engagement and retention of young people in the programmes.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the centre has satisfactory arrangements for safeguarding children and young people. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education; however, the Education Authority's safeguarding policy for the centre needs to be updated to reflect current guidance, and the access arrangements for young people and adults who use the entrance to the North Belfast Area Project need to be monitored more robustly.

7. Overall effectiveness

Mountcollyer Youth Centre demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will continue to monitor how the organisation sustains improvement; in particular, the need to continue to improve the engagement and the retention levels of senior members in programmes.

APPENDIX 1

Table 1 - Total membership of the young people

Age group	4-9		10-15		16-18		19 +		Numbers involved in outreach/detached	Total Registered each year
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female		
2012/13										
2013/14	15	15	11	14	*	*	*	*		57
2014/15	24	25	17	18	*	7	*	*		92
Current	25	32	20	24	*	7	*	*		111

*fewer than 5 young people registered

Health and Safety

1. The lighting around the centre, and in particular, for the emergency fire exit is inadequate.

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