

# YOUTH INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Shannaghmore Outdoor  
Learning Centre, Newcastle,  
County Down

Report of an inspection in  
March 2020



The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
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CUSTOMER  
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EXCELLENCE



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## 1. Context

Shannaghmore outdoor learning centre (centre) is situated two miles from Newcastle along the coast road towards Kilkeel. The building was purchased by the Education Authority (EA) in 1978 and has been through a series of renovations and upgrades, the most recent in 2014 included improved disability access and the installation of a high ropes course and zip line. The outdoor education service was re-designated as the outdoor learning service (OLS) following the 2017 EA review of outdoor education, the title operations manager incorporates the previous role of warden. The review informed the decision to reduce the number of statutory outdoor learning centres, from eight to four, supported by two additional self-programming centres and a new partnership with three voluntary outdoor centres. The staff team at Shannaghmore is led by an operations manager, who has been in post for 12 month period that included responsibility for another OLC for six months. The staffing complement includes a deputy operations manager, five full-time instructors, three of whom are employed through the trainee youth worker scheme, one clerical officer and seven ancillary staff, including a full-time grounds person, managed by grounds maintenance in EA.

## 2. Views of young people and staff

During discussions with the inspectors, the young people highlighted their enjoyment of staying away from home with their peers and the challenge presented participating in the activities. They also emphasised the safe environment created by the outdoor learning staff. The accompanying teaching staff described the young people's improvement in their confidence and resilience throughout the residential which has benefitted greatly their personal and social development. The centre staff spoke of the difficulties during the transition period following the outdoor education review, but also spoke positively about the continued professional development opportunities provided for them and their satisfaction with the current management arrangements for the centre.

## 3. Focus of the inspection

The inspection focused on:

- the outcomes for the young people;
- the quality of the provision; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

## 4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Outcomes for learners	Very good
Quality of provision	Very good
Leadership and management	Good

## 5. Outcomes for learners

The young people listen attentively, engage enthusiastically and demonstrate accurate recall of information presented during the induction session provided for all groups visiting the centre. They have a clear understanding of the centre's rules regarding fire risks and personal safety and develop self-awareness and team-work skills that are linked appropriately to the pre-activity session. The young people were observed displaying very good communication

skills when working together on the high ropes course and when belaying during climbing activities on the totem pole and climbing wall. There are very good examples of the young people developing their resilience skills when under pressure leading to positive reinforcement to encourage peers. They understand all of the necessary safety risks that are explained very well by the staff. The good use of self-evaluation techniques employed by the young people ensure accurate reflection and valuable evaluations of what they have learned during the various activities.

Developing individual responsibility and leading aspects of their own personal development is a key learning point for the young people for example; making their own beds, choosing equipment, remembering essential information, working as a team to get upstream and using collective mental maths strategies, in order to establish the number of years and time span since the construction of an old bridge during an adventure walk. Appropriate targets for individual progression were set for an activity observed when one group of young people were challenged to walk over uneven ground unaided or with little support, this included encouragement to assume leadership roles. A key learning outcome is the co-operation between the young people that is used well by staff to demonstrate that they can achieve more by working together rather than in isolation or in opposition. There is a clear progression of skills and increase in confidence and self-esteem as a result of participation in the appropriately challenging activities. For example, the group progression was measureable throughout an archery session in the increasingly accurate number of shots and observing young people's ability to advise those with the bow, about stance and aim. While the young people engage positively in the very good range of learning experiences it is important that they continue to recognise and build on the connections between their formal and non-formal learning.

The centre provides a number of accredited programmes for adults and young people including, Hill Walking level 1 and 2. A small number of young people have successfully completed the bronze supervisor's course for the Duke of Edinburgh award and 24 participants completed the John Muir environmental award scheme. Going forward, it will be important, where possible, to increase the number of accredited and non-accredited courses available to young people.

## **6. Quality of provision**

The large number and variety of activities provide a broad and balanced range of programmes that meet the needs of each individual group. During the induction process each group is given the chance to decide their activities which are well-matched to the young people's needs, abilities and interests. The choices are generally dependent on the weather and the expertise and qualifications of the available instructors.

The staff have recently introduced a pre-residential visit to primary schools, where the centre staff provide useful information to the teachers and the pupils about outdoor learning. The feedback from the teachers and pupils about this visit is very positive, they report a greater understanding of the centre prior to the residential, the safety aspects and potential risk and challenges that the young people may encounter. This visit is now providing increased opportunities for centre and school-based staff to consider and plan for the educational benefits of outdoor learning that could be linked better to the formal curriculum at Key Stage 2.

Almost all of the sessions observed were very good or better with a minority outstanding. In the most effective practice the sessions are well planned, taking account of the particular needs and levels of ability of each group. The briefing sessions build upon the work completed in the school in preparation for the visit. The language used by the staff is simple, direct and is appropriate for each age group and understood clearly by the young people. The high quality instruction takes account of the outcomes and what can be achieved by each group.

While the emphasis is on fun there is an important focus on 'challenge through choice', environmental awareness, the building of confidence and self-esteem and the promotion of positive mental health. The sessions are interactive with good use of new technology, appropriate use of questions and one of the key strengths is the very good participation by the young people. The staff reinforce the natural environment with the young people and increase their understanding of the importance of conservation and sustainable development.

The organisation complete a new and appropriately revised updated application form which is informative and is processed centrally in the EA. This provides an opportunity for the staff from the organisation to identify the wider educational objectives and for the young people to suggest activities that they would like to participate in. As the OLS develops it will be important to continue to gather evidence in a formal manner in order to evaluate more fully, the impact of outdoor learning on the wider education objectives. There is a need for example, to measure and report accurately on, the contribution and effectiveness of OLS in improving the young people's academic attainment and emotional development that results in an improvement to their mental health and well-being. This will require a greater level of cooperation between teachers and OLC staff.

The guidance and support provided by the instructors is consistently very good. They take account of the group needs and interests and the young people are supported very well irrespective of their background. The OLC staff recognise clearly, the link between the development of the young people's resilience and their life chances, described by one member of staff as, "soft skills leading to hard results." These characteristics are reinforced clearly through the residential experiences observed and result in the development of essential skills for life in preparation for employment and as participation in wider society. The capturing and measuring of these skills need to be developed further through a systematic approach to critical reflection and self-evaluation by the OLS.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the centre's approach to the care and welfare of the young people impacts positively on learning, teaching and outcomes for learners. There is a positive ethos evident in the way that all of the staff provide a safe and secure environment. The staff work together and provide a collective responsibility to help young people overcome barriers to learning and helping fulfil their potential.

## **7. Leadership and management**

Following the review of outdoor education in 2017 there have been significant changes in the leadership and management of outdoor learning across the EA as a new strategic vision for the OLS begins to embed. Senior managers in the EA have produced a comprehensive outdoor learning service developmental plan for the period 2020-2023 which connects appropriately the key youth service educational objectives and planned areas for action, including raising standards for all and closing the performance gap. As the new OLS develops and grows, it is important that the systems in place for the evaluation of the development plan are agreed and understood by outdoor learning staff, schools and organisations who use the centre, including all levels of management.

While the OLS development plan contains 18 ambitious areas for action, the centre's own action plan does not sufficiently reflect the key actions and targets in the development plan. The centre's new action plan for 2020-21 needs to be reviewed so that the areas of actions are prioritised, measurable and demonstrate the quality experiences and learning for the young people, to include the nine assessed areas in the 'gold standard accreditation award'<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Gold Standard is the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Award (AHOEC) which accredits high quality learning.

The self-evaluation process outlined in the gold standard award should be aligned with the centres self-evaluation process in order to review the provision to identify appropriate strengths and areas for improvement.

The operations manager has been in post full-time in the centre since January 2020 and has made positive changes that the staff have embraced. He has demonstrated the capacity to lead his team effectively in a short period of time. The weekly supervision meetings for the staff team are informative, supportive and encourage a cohesive and collective approach to the work of the centre. While the centre staff appreciate the professional development opportunities, the whole staff team need to develop a clearer vision and identity for the centre.

The introduction of the residential planning form and the pre-visit to schools by staff is impacting positively on the outcomes for the young people. The effective links between the teachers and the centre staff are developing a better understanding of the wider educational benefits between formal and non-formal education, where formal education experiences sit alongside experiences in non-formal settings. This important work is being progressed appropriately through further development of post-residential visits by instructors to schools.

The current methods of evaluation, for example through the updated end of residential evaluation form, is capturing well the individual experiences of each organisation and individual young people. Typical comments include, the good development of teamwork, the building of confidence and self-esteem, the excellent instruction and the all-round enjoyment of the residential experiences. The good quality of the catering and the food is mentioned very positively by almost all of the organisations. The centre is continuing to develop appropriate methods of capturing the views of the young people and visiting staff to measure the impact of the learning on the young people more effectively. Going forward it will be important to further involve young people to deliver on the action planning for the development of the OLS youth voice. The process for action planning, through critical reflection and self-evaluation, is not clear enough and needs to be further developed and linked to the centres action plan.

There are improving partnership links between the volunteer centre and the centre. Going forward it will be important to: outline the purpose and vision of the partnership; share effective practice and resources; and set a clear vision for moving forward together.

## **8. Safeguarding**

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding young people broadly reflect the guidance from the Department of Education. However, the organisation needs to ensure that its safeguarding policies and procedures reflect more fully the legislation and practice relating to adults who may be at risk of harm or in need of protection. The centre is aware of the need to make more visual information available for young people on how to raise a concern or make a complaint.

The young people report that they feel safe in the organisation and that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or welfare.

## **9. Overall effectiveness**

Shannaghmore outdoor learning centre demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. There are areas for improvement that the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The areas for improvement are the need:

- for the EA to ensure the centre action plan prioritises relevant, strategic and measurable actions that can be evaluated to review provision and identify appropriate and specific strengths and areas for improvement; and
- for the centre to continue to develop the relationship between the formal and non-formal curricula to enable young people to make appropriate connections across their educational experiences and the world around them.

**Health and safety/accommodation**

There is a need to carry out the following repairs urgently in order to keep the children, young people and staff safe. There is a need to:

- repair the fire door in the downstairs common room;
- replace and repair the necessary decking outside the main entrance;
- review the safety of the decking leading to the canteen area; and
- repair urgently the downspout and guttering on the store and at the bunkhouse.

## Statistical Data

Table 1: Total attendance

Key stage	2		3		4		Post-16		Youth 9-13		Youth 14-18		Youth 19-21		Adult 18+		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
2017/18	605	529	106	132	11	42	28	45	135	129	194	184	4	6	0	0	2150
2018/19	720	704	78	36	91	107	0	0	174	123	133	144	0	0	23	6	2339
2019/20	553	560	130	137			3	6	114	157	153	177	17	18	0	0	2025

Table 2: Number of Schools using the Outdoor Learning Centre

Year	Controlled Primary	Maintained Primary	Controlled Secondary	Maintained Secondary	Special Schools	Total
2017/18	33	9	2	7	1	52
2018/19	38	10	6	6	1	61
2019/20	37	9	5	6	3	60

Table 3: Number of Youth Organisations using the Outdoor Learning Centre

Year	Controlled	Voluntary	Uniform	Total
2017/18	8	19	5	32
2018/19	11	9	7	27
2019/2020	12	8	7	27

Table 4: Leadership training in the last twelve months

Title of course including accreditation details	Number of young people enrolled	Number of adults enrolled	Percentage successfully completing
Hill-walking level 2		14	100%
Bronze supervisors training course		17	100%
REC First Aid		21	100%
Youth Service Training		24	100%
Youth Service Training		28	100%

Source: data as held by the organisation. \* fewer than 5 N/A not available

**Inspection methodology and evidence base**

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website at [The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework \(ISEF\): Youth](#)

Inspectors observed youth work sessions and also held focus group discussions with the young people. The inspectors held discussions with, representatives of the management, staff and other stakeholders. In addition, the inspectors scrutinised the staff planning and the organisation's self-evaluation reports. The inspectors evaluated the organisation's arrangements for safeguarding young people.

## Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

### Quantitative terms

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 ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on outcomes for learners, quality of provision and 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 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 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 formal follow-up inspection.
The organisation needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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