

# YOUTH INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Mary's Youth Centre,  
Portadown

Report of an inspection in  
October 2015

## Quantitative terms used by the ETI

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; and
- the quality of the leadership and management, including the processes for self-evaluation leading to improvement.

## 2. Context

St Mary's Youth Centre is a full-time, voluntary youth organisation situated on the Craigwell Avenue and Corcrain Road interface in Portadown. The centre is managed by a local management committee and receives funding from the Education Authority. The centre has two full-time staff, as well as a team of part-time staff and volunteers, and is open six evenings each week.

The range of programmes includes: after-schools provision; an unemployed club; work with local primary and post-primary schools; drop-in provision for older members and extended opening hours on weekend evenings.

According to information supplied by the organisation, there were 349 young people registered last year. At the time of the inspection, 252 young people had registered for the incoming year. The overall membership figures for the centre have remained stable over the last four years. One-third of the membership has been registered for four or more years.

## 3. Overall findings of the inspection

| Overall effectiveness      | High level of capacity for sustained improvement |
|----------------------------|--|
| Achievements and standards | Outstanding                                      |
| Provision for learning     | Outstanding                                      |
| Leadership and management  | Outstanding                                      |

## 4. Achievements and standards

The young people are friendly, welcoming and enjoy excellent relationships with one another and with the staff. They have a strong sense of belonging to the centre and enthusiastically take responsibility, alongside their leaders, for determining and facilitating the programmes.

Through the recreational and group work programmes, the young people are developing their team-work skills, self-confidence and self-esteem. The centre targets, attracts and engages an extensive range of young people from different cultural and social backgrounds, including those who are at risk of being socially isolated or marginalised. The young people are welcoming of all newcomers and new members are well inducted and integrated into the life of the centre. In addition, they have benefitted socially and personally from community relations programmes with other young people from across the Portadown area.

The younger members enjoy a broad range of activities well matched to their needs, abilities and interests. When they progress from primary school and their after-school programmes, they respond well to the evening 'teenage' environment; and their consistently good standards of behaviour ensure that they, and their peers, enjoy participating in the more informal programmes. Consistently, and across all of the sessions observed, the young people self-manage their interactions with one another creating a lively, good humoured atmosphere.

The senior members participate in programmes which challenge, interest and develop their personal and social skills. Almost all of them engage in and benefit from a range of courses and programmes, which are group work based, and through which they successfully achieve qualifications or recognition for their participation. For example, through their resilience and determination, they continue to progress through and achieve excellent success in the Duke Of Edinburgh's Award<sup>1</sup>, Youth Achievement Awards<sup>2</sup>, Millennium Volunteer Awards<sup>3</sup> and additional youth work accredited programmes. The staff and the young people have high expectations that every opportunity will be used to develop further the young people's skills, knowledge and understanding of others.

The young people in this centre aspire to be volunteers and contribute regularly to the successful running of the programmes. They are developing excellent leadership and project development skills, and recognise the relevance of these programmes to their formal education, as well as to their future career and training pathways. The older members use the many volunteering opportunities effectively to support the younger members; they state that they feel valued as volunteers and know that they are held in high regard by the staff and the younger members.

## **5. Provision for learning**

The quality of the youth work sessions observed ranged from outstanding to good; with almost all sessions evaluated as very good or outstanding. The inclusive ethos which permeates all aspects of the centre's provision is excellent. The young people, staff and volunteers all promote the centre as a shared space that they are very proud to be a part of, where regardless of your culture, ethnic origin, or social circumstances, you are welcomed, accepted and respected. The centre was refurbished two years ago and is an attractive, colourful, teenage environment.

The staff are continuously and consistently engaging fully with the young people; they are flexible, creative and responsive to the young people's ideas and interests. In addition to structured, age-appropriate and well planned programmes, the staff also skilfully engage the young people in 'spur of the moment' activities. The facilitation of informal discussions by staff is of a high quality; for example, a conversation about risky behaviours was used purposefully by a member of staff to challenge the young people's attitudes and encourage positive and safe choices.

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<sup>1</sup> The Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme has three levels for young people aged 14 to 24 years, which when completed, lead to a Bronze, Silver or Gold Award

<sup>2</sup> The Youth Achievement Awards are a peer education approach to recognising and accrediting young people's achievements. There are four levels of Award: Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum, depending on the level of challenge and responsibility for the young people, aged 13 years to 25 years.

<sup>3</sup> The Millennium Volunteer Award is a national programme that recognises your volunteering by providing a certificate after the first 50, 100 and 200 hours of volunteering.

There is an excellent breadth and balance of recreational, and group work programmes available every night and also during the daytime. The centre staff and the young people have appropriately identified and are working hard to attract greater numbers of young females to the centre. Through their outreach work in local schools and the community, they are already achieving success in their endeavours to further this objective.

The late night extended opening is very well attended and provides an effective and purposeful environment for the young people to meet. The drop-in provision is mostly informal group work and recreational activities, but more formal group discussions are also well facilitated, for example, about drug and alcohol misuse. This extended provision is valued highly by the young people and the staff are actively encouraging the young people to make new friendships and to engage in new experiences.

A particular strength of the provision is the summer programme, which is thoroughly enjoyed by all of the volunteers and young people. There is an excellent range of new experiences on offer to the young people; and in an area where sectarian tensions can be very challenging, the young people and their local community benefit greatly from this programme.

The unemployed club is very effectively managed by the staff, addressing the physical, mental and social well-being of the young people. The well-conceived and planned outcomes enable young people to achieve practical and relevant skills leading to accreditation and future employment. For example, the young people have achieved a Customer Service Award<sup>4</sup>, and Inclusive Games Training; the current link with Southern Regional College is also providing them with access to other essential training and progression pathways to further education and employment.

The quality of the arrangements for care and support within the centre is outstanding. The mutually respectful working relationships between the staff and the young people create a sound ethos to progress further the personal and social development of the young people. The young people spoke highly of their experiences and informed the members of 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. In the discussions with a small number of parents, they highlighted: their high level of confidence in the staffs' genuine care and support for their children; the excellent quality of the programmes throughout the year; and the inclusive ethos of the centre.

## **6. Leadership and management**

The highly experienced, competent staff and management committee have a very clear and well-informed understanding of the needs of the young people and their communities. Their excellent strategic vision for the future development of the centre is well conceived and embedded into the inclusive ethos which drives all of the work of the staff. This shared vision has an appropriately strong focus on growing the membership of the centre and continuing to welcome young people from all backgrounds across Portadown.

The management committee are supportive, challenging and strong advocates for the centre and its staff. While young people are not directly involved in the management committee for the centre, their views are sought, listened to and acted upon. The leadership are exploring less formal structures of participation to ensure that the collective voice of the young people is developed further.

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<sup>4</sup> The Customer Service Award and Inclusive Games Training are Open College Network level one courses.

The highly effective curricular leadership is matched closely to the needs and interests of the young people. All of the staff are involved in planning and evaluating their own programmes, closely aligned to the overall service level agreement which the centre has with the Education Authority. The annual report for the centre includes contributions from all of the staff and is used to showcase the range of successful programmes.

There are strong, collegial working relationships among the staff; as a team they support one another and work effectively in pairs and teams to continuously improve the quality of the provision. They are well deployed and the distributive leadership within the centre is reflected in their confident management of their own programme areas and the responsibilities which they willingly accept. The smooth operation of the centre is evidence of the willingness among the staff to assume leadership responsibilities and to work collaboratively.

The staff and management committee have a clear and shared focus on the continuous improvement of the experiences provided for the young people. Their recent engagement in a quality assurance process, which also involved the young people of the centre, has set, agreed and planned for the evaluation of realistic targets, which were identified collaboratively to develop further the work of the centre.

The staff and management committee have an excellent range of strategic partnerships, which add value to the experiences and resources available for the young people. The long-standing and highly effective partnerships with local schools and the youth centre are mutually beneficial. The leadership of the schools and the youth centre have a shared vision of the benefits of engaging young people in purposeful and safe activities after school and in the evenings.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the centre has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children and young people. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

## **7. Overall effectiveness**

St Mary's Youth Centre 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.

**APPENDIX****Table 1 - Total membership**

| Age group | 4-9  |        | 10-15 |        | 16-18 |        | 19 + |        | Total |
|-----------|------|--------|-------|--------|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|
|           | Male | Female | Male  | Female | Male  | Female | Male | Female |       |
| 2012/13   | 20   | 10     | 132   | 66     | 56    | 40     | 17   | 16     | 357   |
| 2013/14   | 28   | 18     | 129   | 77     | 34    | 28     | 12   | 14     | 340   |
| 2014/15   | 39   | 33     | 135   | 85     | 20    | 21     | 8    | 8      | 349   |
| Current   | 31   | 15     | 89    | 49     | 31    | 18     | 12   | 7      | 252   |



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