



ARDMORE HOUSE

Risk Management Statement

January 2023

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Ardmore House provides challenging learning experiences for pupils in an outdoor/adventure setting. However, by their very nature some of the adventurous activities contain an element of real risk, without which they would be less valuable in terms of positive learning experiences, benefits, and outcomes. Minor injuries, scrapes, bumps and getting cold and wet are commonplace when participating in these activities and are therefore par for the course; occasional, more serious but non-life-threatening injuries such as broken bones, sprains etc. are always a possibility.

Through a system of formal and informal activity management procedures detailed in this document, Ardmore House staff aim to reduce and control this element of real risk as much as reasonably possible and are absolutely committed to ensure that participants are never deliberately exposed to unacceptable and untenable levels of risk.

Supporting Research

There is a substantial body of research which indicates that well planned, organised and evaluated programme of outdoor pursuits activities is of significant benefit to pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Such programmes enable participants to experience the outdoors and build physical stamina, train them in various life skills: planning abilities, teamwork, confronting stress situations, assuming personal responsibility and leading/being led in a group. (Adams 1969, Friese 1996, Goldenberg 2001, Neill 2003, Raines 1985).

‘Outdoor Education’ programmes have received considerable attention as rehabilitative and preventative interventions for young people with behavioural problems (Wilson & Howell, 1993). In a wilderness challenge programme, young people participate in a series of physically challenging activities, such as hiking, mountain biking and rock climbing, usually in an outdoor environment. These programmes are based on the idea of ‘learning by doing’ and involve learning opportunities that include a series of increasingly challenging physical activities. The participant experiences a pattern of success and thereby builds confidence, self-esteem and gains control over their behaviour and emotions. The physical activities included in such programmes have several characteristic elements that facilitate this process. The activities are unfamiliar and demanding, the problems they present are concrete and incremental, stress and perceived risk are used constructively, and the consequences of failure are obvious and can be substantial (Kimball & Bacon, 1993).

Studies suggest that providing learning opportunities in natural settings can have a positive effect on an individual’s mental health (Maller, 2009; Mirrahimi, Tawil, Addullah, & Usman, 2011). A short-term (mean 13h teaching time) outdoor learning programme that occurred one afternoon a week across a half term reported that participation was associated with a reduction in exclusion rates (Fox & Avramidis, 2003).

In-depth interviews with 11 participants with **SEBD**, suggested that ‘the programme was successful in promoting positive behaviour’ (Fox & Avramidis, 2003, p. 273). In particular, five participants demonstrated consistently positive behaviour during outdoor education lessons in marked contrast to their generally inconsistent, poor behaviour in other lessons. The observational findings were supported by interview data from school personnel. Each ‘reaffirmed the success of the programme in promoting positive behaviour’ (Fox & Avramidis, 2003, p. 275) L.

Evidence demonstrates how important it is for children to be given the opportunity to discover, learn about and experience the natural world. It enables a sense of belonging and identity rooted in their local environment, enhancing health, wellbeing and educational outcomes whilst helping to safeguard the future of their environment. (Tam, 2013)

Research from Barrable & Booth, (2020) concluded that “more emphasis could be placed on measuring alternative activities that bring children in sustained or condensed contact with nature, such as forest schools, adventure activities, and wildlife expeditions.” And is support by findings from Wells, N.M. (2000) which found that children who are exposed to natural or outdoor settings receive benefits to their cognitive health, such as *reduction of ADHD symptoms*.

It has long been our experience in Ardmore that the benefits to those who participate in these activities are substantial and long lasting. Indeed, from our behavioural records, pupils attending an outdoor pursuits activity behave significantly better the following week and beyond.

We aim to carry out a programme of adventure activities to address the needs of the pupils, specifically in the following areas:

Teambuilding/ Trust Building

Group Navigation, low ropes course, orienteering team building activities

Exploration/ Self Awareness

Hiking, Campcraft, Navigation, Paddlesports, Mountain Biking, Archery

Perceived Risk Activities

Mountain biking, Bouldering, Caving, Rock Climbing

Risk Assessment

Adventurous Activities programmed at the school take place in close consultation with all relevant staff and take into account other variables such as weather, age and ability of group, pupil – staff ratios, experience, venue etc.

Each activity has undergone a static and site-specific ‘risk/benefit’ evaluation, hard copies of which follow. These aim to identify and reduce risks and are reviewed by all staff involved, before the activity. This review takes account of variables such as weather, group dynamics, individual skills levels etc.

Ardmore House considers it good practice to involve young people in the process of assessing risk.

Dynamic risk assessment is defined as the continuous process of identifying hazards, assessing risk, taking action to eliminate or reduce risk, monitoring and reviewing in rapidly changing circumstances. Leading staff rely on their training and extensive experience to undertake this dynamic process before, during and after each activity.

Ardmore House is very aware of its duty to expose participants, particularly young people, to well-managed and reasonable risks. Discussions which focus on the difference between real and perceived risk may help them appreciate the higher risk activities they may choose to do with peers, away from the influence of adults.

All risk management procedures and assessments are reviewed termly, or earlier, in the event of an incident/near miss.

Training

Mr Mulholland has received specific hazard and risk assessment training from Health and Safety Limited.

Equipment

Ardmore provides all the specialist equipment required to participate in the adventurous activities listed above. All equipment is fit for purpose and is inspected on a regular basis. Ardmore House staff are responsible for the selection, maintenance, checking, recording and retiring of activity equipment.

Detailed maintenance programmes are in place for specific equipment such as buoyancy aids and helmets.

Any damaged safety equipment is removed from the equipment operation stores and placed in a repairs area.

When not in use, adventurous activity equipment is kept in a locked store, and will only be made available to staff that are appropriately qualified or experienced to use it.

First Aid

All staff leading an outdoor/ adventure activity will hold a current and appropriate Outdoor First Aid qualification, such as Rescue Emergency Care 16 Hour Outdoor First Aid or an equivalent/ higher award.

External Training and Certification

Activities provided fall into seven main areas.

(i) Hillwalking/Mountaineering (to include low-level scrambling)

Mr McMahon holds a Mountain Training Association - Mountain Leader award. This enables him to lead groups of people in mountain terrain, including multi-day expeditions, wild camping and scrambling.

Mr Fettes currently holds an Education Authority NI - Mountain Leader level 2 award. This enables him to take up to 8 participants into the mountains in the summer months.

(ii) Mountain Biking

Mr Fettes holds a MBCUK trail cycle leader award and a mountain bike coaching license with the Association of British Cycling Schemes. This covers both on and off-road cycling.

Mr McMahon holds a Cycling Ireland trail cycle leader award. This covers both on and off-road cycling.

(iii) Paddlesports

Mr McMahon is a Level 3 Kayak, Level 2 Canoe coach and holds a Paddleboard endorsement, registered with the British Canoe Union. This allows him to take groups of 6 participants kayaking on grade 2 rivers, including expeditions, and groups of up to 10 participants in a sheltered water environment, using a range of different crafts.

Mr Fettes is a level 1 canoe coach and holds a Paddleboard endorsement, registered with the British Canoe Union. This allows him to take groups of up to 8 participants in a sheltered water environment, using a range of different crafts.

Mr Fettes, Mr Mulholland and Mr McMahon all hold a current Foundation Safety and Rescue Training certificate, endorsed by the Canoe Association of N. Ireland.

(iv) Indoor Climbing

Mr McMahon holds a Climbing Wall Instructor Award, including abseil module which allows him to take groups of 8 participants on manmade climbing walls and run an abseil using fixed anchor points.

Mr Fettes holds a Climbing Wall Instructor Award which allows him to take groups of 8 participants on manmade climbing walls.

Mr Mulholland has completed the training for this award and has been signed off by Tollymore National Outdoor Centre as being able to assist with climbing wall activities.

Other staff at the school have completed an in-house supervisor assessment programme. This enables them to take a small group on the Ardmore traverse wall for recreational/educational purposes.

(v) Archery

Mr Fettes and Mr Mulholland currently hold an Archery GB Leader award.

Mr McMahon has 15 years' experience of delivering archery sessions.

(vi) Bouldering/Coasteering

Mr McMahon has over 17 years of experience delivering bouldering and coasteering sessions throughout N. Ireland. He has also delivered site-specific training to other instructors.

Mr Fettes and Mr Mulholland have both completed site-specific training with Tollymore National Outdoor Centre and have been signed off to take groups bouldering in the Spinkwee and Bloody Bridge rivers.

In the absence of a formal qualification or governing body, the school have adapted the 'Base Level Skills and Competencies for Coasteering Guides Version 1 (2020)' from the National Water Safety Forum to suit a river environment.

(vii) Teambuilding

Mr Fettes, Mr Mulholland and Mr McMahon have all completed training with Tollymore National Outdoor Centre and have been signed off to use their low-ropes course. All the elements of the Ardmore ropes course are also found in the Tollymore course and accordingly the training is sufficient for both.

(viii) Campcraft/outdoor cooking

Mr Fettes, Mr Mulholland, Mr Speers and Mr McMahon have received appropriate training and hold relevant qualifications that enable them to deliver lessons involving campcraft and outdoor cooking.