



Durham Youth Council

Young Inspectors Report

Organisation / Venue:	234 (City of Durham) Squadron ATC
Type	Cadets
Age range:	12-17 (17-20 optional)
Date & Time of Inspection:	09.12.2024 18:30-21:00
Purpose of Inspection: (Methods, who requested)	Observation, Interview/Focus Groups, Online Sqn Ldr Mat Burton / Sqn Ldr Dan Laidler
Inspectors:	Alfie Dixon Clark, Makayla Harwood, Miah Burns

Summary

234 (City of Durham) Squadron ATC are part of the UK's Air Training Corps. The Air Training Corps along with the Combined Cadet Force (RAF) form the RAF Air Cadets, a national youth organisation support by the Royal Air Force. They offer provision for young people aged 12-17 years old.

The centre has a clean, calm, friendly, well-structured setting, with relevant displays and high expectations of their young people to maintain it's appearance and atmosphere.

The staff are friendly, encouraging and have high expectations of the young people they work with, encouraging a diverse, respectful, tolerant environment for their young people to thrive in.

They offer a range of exciting, skill based activities, which introduce their young people to new skills, problem solving and experiences, which builds on their social and emotional and life skills development too.

We recommend 234 to any young person looking to make new friends, lasting relationships, try new things and develop their skills.

Overall, we believe that 234 are an outstanding example of the Air Training Corps, offering something for everyone, in a balanced, friendly, encouraging environment, which allows their young people to thrive during their transition to adulthood.

Website & Online Presence

Overall, for the website and online presence portion of the inspection it was very good.

There are accounts on multiple platforms that get updated frequently, showcasing useful and important information about the activities of the cadets.

Also, it was very easy to find by just searching it up, all accounts showed up very easily and the sites were very simple to use and find what you're looking for.

Our only recommendations were possibly promoting the websites more in person as previously, most members were unaware of the website.

The cadets also have their own online platform where they can communicate information with each other, including tasks and what they need to get done. This also offers the opportunity to share key dates and reminders. One of the young people, showed us how it worked, it seemed straight forward, and the Cadet knew their way around the system easily. A great way to keep everyone up to date and in touch, without the safeguarding issues of using a public forum.

Journey to Venue

Locating the building with google maps took you to the right area, but not directly to the building, and there wasn't much signage to help you find it. It took us a little while to find the right building, we almost missed the turning. We all needed help from our worker, who had been there before.

There were many options of transport nearby, including the train to Durham, then a little bit of a walk to the building, buses and you could drive there or book a taxi.

Though, for opening at 6:30, the street isn't very well lit, especially when it is dark.

Environment

The environment of 234 (City of Durham) Squadron ATC was exceptionally tidy and very clean, even going as far as having the cadets do duties after every session.

The atmosphere was lovely, even though it was quite a formal, structure setting, every one felt relaxed and everyone was friendly and polite.

The establishment had female, male, and disabled toilets which were obviously labelled.

There were many posters and notices around the building, including a safeguarding and map near the staff room, showing where the fire exit is if necessary. It was quite an accessible area and had many different breakout rooms.

Though, many cadets, while interviewed, said that they wished there was more space, especially a sports hall so they wouldn't have to do drills outside in the winter.

When asked, the staff were able to talk about safety and the rules, even having a sanction book in case of any behaviour that they do not want in the building.

Staff

In summary, the staff portion of the inspection was very nice, the staff made us feel very welcomed straight away and were very helpful in our inspection and noticeably to a lot of the cadets.

The young people spoke very highly of the cadets, saying things like 'we're a family' and 'flight lieutenant Scott is like a dad to us'.

They were very professional and knowledgeable without seeming too scary and it was a nice mix of volunteers and workers.

Volunteers and staff have a range of roles, playing to their strengths, and things they are responsible for. Volunteers can be previous Cadets, or veterans, but can also be civilians. Civilian volunteers usually bring different skills to the table, that might not come as standard with military/cadet experienced volunteers, these skills are helpful when young people are working towards badges.

What we were particularly impressed with is learning that the cadets are not a recruitment organisation, and staff thoroughly stand by this, they give young people the opportunities to develop their skills and emotional intelligence, with a chance to build them up from basic blue to gold and develop a career in the air forces, if they want to, but in actual fact, most of the skills they can choose to develop could be transferred into many different civilian jobs and roles also.

Session briefings at the beginning of the night meant the leader knew exactly what was happening and who was responsible for what throughout the evening. A similar briefing is given to the cadets, so they also know which staff member is responsible for what.

What was interesting, is that at the end of the evening, cadets are given 'chores' to help clean and restore the building to how it was when the session started, staff oversee it. This builds independence and teaches life skills to the young people, also encourages them to take pride in their building, and gives the staff time to do what they need to do at the end of the night.

No recommendations here as the staff were extremely nice from all perspectives.

Activities

The Durham RAF cadets have a variety of structured activities available that provide a lot of great opportunities for their young people to learn, progress and develop their skills.

It is very formally structured as every activity takes place at a certain time and it is made sure that every activity starts and finishes at the exact times they are supposed to and that everybody is where they are meant to be for their duties. The cadets also get assigned roles that alternate so everybody gets the chance to help out with cleaning and other chores, which keeps the environment clean and tidy and the young people are able to take responsibility.

Activities, such as the flight simulator or gliding, are very good because they give them hands-on experience that is made memorable by how enjoyable the young people have found it. Other activities they have, such as drill practice and stretcher bearing helps to develop teamwork skills because they need to all work together and communicate with each other. It also develops their problem-solving skills since the staff help them and guide them through the process of decision making and help them to think independently. Activities that take place off-site are made sure to be affordable and that the young people are able to make their way there.

Badges can be earned in certain areas of training to learn their basic skills. They can then choose to further progress their different badges, which would help a young person know more about what they would like to do in the future and make them feel very accomplished.

Young people are also offered the opportunity to complete their Duke of Edinburgh Award, this can contribute to their badge collecting.

There are additional activities for their leisure, such as a Christmas party or making presentations. When there, we saw groups of the cadets showcase presentations they had made about what they had done that year. The presentations contained music and lots of photos of each other, some funny ones as well. They also told their favourite and funniest stories that had happened that year, which showed the relationships they had formed with one another over the time of being there and that they had all bonded.

We were surprised to hear that some of the cadets we spoke to come from further afield than Durham or its immediately surrounding areas, when asked why they attend Durham, when other places are closer to home, it's because Durham offer more opportunities.

Recommendations

To make the service 234 (City of Durham) Squadron ATC offer even better and try to deter some of the anti-social behaviour they've been experiencing, we'd recommend;

- Review signage, although we could find the general location, finding the building and entrance was difficult.
- Speak to the local council to see about better street lighting in the side street leading to the building, or invest in some lights for the side of the building, so the way to the entrance is well lit, for safety, but also making it easier to find.
- Start to look for more room, with ever growing numbers, we can see that the building is fit to burst, and it's popularity as being one of the 'better squadrons' shows. Moving into the space upstairs, or being offered a bigger location would strengthen the work done.
- Sharing good practice with other squadrons so that other young people can experience the same Durham has to offer. Location shouldn't mean the opportunities provided for young people are different, or any less.