



Education
Endowment
Foundation



UNIVERSITY
of York

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Adventure Learning Evaluation: Commando Joe's Inspire to Achieve Programme

School Information Sheet

1. About the Project

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has commissioned the University of York to evaluate Commando Joe's Inspire to Achieve Programme. The study is designed to understand whether structured, adventure-based learning delivered in schools via the Inspire to Achieve programme can improve Year 9 pupils' self-regulation, resilience, wellbeing, and learning, particularly for those at risk of disengagement.

2. What is Commando Joe's Inspire to Achieve Programme?

Inspire to Achieve is a structured, 24-week instructor-led programme designed to support the personal development, resilience, and character education of pupils across the 2025–26 academic year. Delivered weekly to small, targeted groups, the programme provides a consistent and supportive environment where pupils can build essential life skills that complement and strengthen whole-school behaviour, pastoral, and inclusion systems. Each participating school is allocated a trained Commando Joe's (CJ) instructor who becomes a regular, positive presence in the school community, working closely with staff to ensure the programme aligns with pupils' wider needs and school priorities.

Central to the programme is the **RESPECT framework**, which underpins every session and provides a clear structure for developing pupils' character and emotional regulation. RESPECT represents: **Resilience, Empathy, Self-awareness, Positivity/Passion, Excellence, Communication, and Teamwork**. Through this framework, pupils learn to understand their own strengths and challenges, develop positive relationships with others, and adopt constructive attitudes to learning and problem-solving. Instructors explicitly model and reinforce these values, helping pupils recognise how RESPECT principles apply both within the programme and throughout their daily school lives.

Each weekly session includes a blend of **practical, scenario-based challenges** and **guided reflection**, allowing pupils to learn through experience as well as discussion. Activities may include problem-solving tasks, team-building missions, physical challenges, or creative group projects designed to encourage pupils to think critically, work collaboratively, and manage emotions under pressure. The emphasis is on developing attributes such as perseverance,

motivation, emotional control, and confidence—all of which are vital for success in school and in their wider personal development.

The reflective element of each session is a key strength of the programme. Pupils are supported to think about how they approached the challenge, how they contributed to the team, and what they could do differently next time. This structured reflection helps embed self-regulation skills and gives pupils the tools to transfer new learning into other contexts, such as classroom behaviour, peer interactions, and academic tasks.

Commando Joe's works flexibly to ensure the programme fits seamlessly within the school day. Sessions can be scheduled during curriculum time, intervention slots, or inclusion periods depending on the needs of the cohort. In addition to the timetabled weekly session, instructors enhance the impact of the programme by offering **lunchtime and after-school sessions**, which may include informal mentoring, wellbeing support, structured activities, or additional team challenges. These extra opportunities help pupils maintain continuity, reinforce learning, and build trusted relationships with the CJ instructor.

Overall, the "Inspire to Achieve" programme is designed not only to address behaviour or engagement concerns but to nurture well-rounded, confident, and self-aware young people. By blending physical activity, teamwork, coaching, and character education, Commando Joe's provides a highly engaging, motivational experience that empowers pupils to thrive both in school and beyond.

3. The Evaluation

This is a two-arm Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) to robustly measure the impact of the Commando Joe's programme on pupils:

- We're looking for 66 schools to participate in the trial.
- Schools will be randomly allocated to either the intervention group (allocated to receive Commando Joe's Inspire to Achieve programme) or the control group (business-as-usual).
- Randomisation ensures fair and unbiased comparison of outcomes across schools. Schools have a 50/50 chance of being randomly assigned to either group
- Schools in the control group will not receive the Inspire to Achieve programme and will be asked to continue with 'business as usual' to act a comparison group. It is essential however that schools allocated to the control group continue to engage in the evaluation activities. Schools in both groups play an important role in contributing to the evidence base of what works well to improve the intended outcomes for young people through a programme that uses an adventure learning and character development approach.

- The evaluation will also look at how the intervention is working in schools. This includes understanding delivery quality, staff and pupil experiences, and school context. This will involve focus groups with staff and short interviews with pupils in a small number of schools.

4. What Will Taking Part Involve?

Schools that agree to take part will either be allocated to be an intervention school or control school. Below, we explain what participation will involve for all schools, as well as what this will involve for intervention schools specifically.

4.1. All schools will need to:

- Read and sign a Memorandum of Understanding confirming your commitment to taking part in the evaluation.
- Read and sign the school consent form.
- Select 24 pupils currently in Year 8 (who will be in Year 9 for delivery in the academic year 26/27) using the pupil selection criteria. These include indicators such as academic underperformance and at least one additional risk factor (e.g., low attendance, behaviour concerns, or wellbeing challenges; full criteria and guidance are provided in the FAQs).
- Support evaluation activities, including:
 - Send out information materials to parents.
 - Administer short online pupil questionnaires in two, 20-minute sessions at three time points: May/June 2026, June 2027, and October 2027. Teachers/school staff will receive training to deliver these questionnaires.
 - Provide school-level data, including pupil identifiers (name, date of birth, gender, UPN, and postcode) for matching with the National Pupil Database (NPD).
 - Complete school survey on adventure learning
- Some schools will be asked to support further evaluation activities by releasing staff for two focus groups online (60 minutes max per session) and pupil interviews (45 minutes max per pupil).
- Agree to not complete any additional adventure learning activities (as defined in the FAQs) with the pupils selected to take part in the trial until after they complete their GCSEs in 2029.

In addition to the above (in section 4.1.), schools in the intervention group will need to:

- Facilitate Commando Joe's programme over 24 weeks, which will be provided to the school at a subsidised cost. Facilitation will include:
 - Providing timetabled sessions weekly for groups of 6 (4 sessions per week, each session 60mins).
 - Releasing a member of school staff to oversee the delivery of the timetabled sessions. The staff member does not have to play an active role in the session

but rather just be on hand. It does not have to be the same member of staff across the session to help make this easier to accommodate.

- Providing appropriate space for Commando Joes to run the sessions such as a consistent classroom to meet the groups, hall or activity space to deliver the programme, and occasional outdoor space.
- Take part in one quality assurance visits each half term. This will involve the QA team conducting a delivery observation and providing feedback, meeting with the school point of contact (PoC) to discuss any administrative concerns or improvements, and ensuring all relevant documentation is correct and up to date.
- Provide space for the optional lunchtime and afterschool sessions, such as the sports hall, drama studio or large classroom, which are open to wider pupils other than just the targeted 24 pupils for the core weekly sessions This is a great way of exposing more of your pupils to Commando Joe's engaging programme in a light touch way

5. Eligibility

Schools taking part must:

- Be state-funded mainstream secondary schools in England with more than 24 Year 8 pupils in the academic year 25/26.
- Have not taken part in any whole-school programmes run by Commando Joe's in the past two school years (since the academic year 24/25).
- Have not used any Commando Joe's programmes with the current Year 8 pupils.
- Have not taken part in Outward Bound Trust residential activities in the past two academic years (24/25 and 25/26). Please note that schools taking part in Outward Bound Trust residential during the academic year 26/27 with a year group other than Year 9 are still welcome to take part in this project.
- Priority will be given to schools where more than 24% of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

Pupils taking part must:

You should select pupils if they meet the following criteria:

- They are in Year 8 in the academic year 25/26
- They are underperforming academically (Category 1) and at least one of the other criteria (Categories 2–4) described in the table below:

Category	Indicators
Category 1: Academic underperformance	Working below expected progress in English or maths (bottom 30% of cohort in school tracking).
Category 2: Behavioural concerns	Be in the top 33% of the year group for behaviour concerns (e.g., frequently causing low level disruption, frequently removed from class due to poor behaviour, altercations at school involving other pupils, pupil's whose behaviour has not improved in response to behaviour strategies or suspensions)

Category 3: Attendance/ engagement risk	0-95% attendance (i.e., “at risk of persistent absence”) in the current school year (N.B., Case-by-case basis: Pupils with attendance < 90% can take part if the teacher thinks the pupil can engage)
Category 4: Wellbeing/ social-emotional needs	Teacher ratings of low confidence, resilience, or belonging (e.g., bottom 33% of cohort on pastoral survey data, if available). Identified by staff as struggling with peer relationships.
Eligibility for free school meals	We ask that you prioritise pupils eligible for free school meals and ensure that at least 9 of the 24 selected pupils are eligible. (This is not a selection criterion on its own, but a request to support sampling.)

6. Financial Support

- Schools in the intervention group: will receive the Commando Joe’s programme at a heavily subsidised rate (schools will only be asked to support 17% of the usual programme delivery costs at £2,500 per school). This is to recognise your efforts participating in delivery and data collection activities
- Schools in the control group: will receive a £1,500 incentive payment for their continued participation in the trial evaluation activities. This will be paid in three instalments linked to completion of baseline and randomisation, endline, and follow-up data collection. This funding should be used for enrichment opportunities for the identified pupils (excluding adventure learning activities as defined in the FAQs).

7. Timeline

Timeframe	Activity
May-June 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select 24 pupils using the criteria set out in the FAQs. • Share requested pupil data necessary for baseline testing.
June-July 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete baseline questionnaires for all pupils.
July/August 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive confirmation of random allocation to intervention or control group.
October 26-May 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of the 24-week programme (Intervention schools only) • Small number of school staff complete focus group (approximately 60 minutes) around January 2027.
June 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All pupils complete endline questionnaires • Small number of school staff complete focus group (approximately 60 minutes). • Small number of pupils will complete interviews (approximately 45 minutes).
October 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete follow-up questionnaires

8. How Will Data Be Used and Protected?

All data will be processed under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Data Protection Act (2018), and the University of York's data management policy, and Commando Joe's data management policy.

- Identifiable data (e.g., pupil names, UPNs) will be pseudonymised for analysis and deleted within six months of project completion.
- Only fully anonymised data will be stored and accessed by the EEF's Evaluation Data Archive.
- No individual pupils, staff, or schools will be named in reports.
- Some pupil level data is required by Commando Joe's for monitoring and tailoring programme delivery. Any data that is solely for the purpose of delivery and does not relate to the evaluation will not be shared with the University of York.

For more details, please refer to the separate School Privacy Notice. All data collection and processing requirements will be outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding for any schools wishing to sign-up to the trial

9. What If My School Wishes to Withdraw?

Schools and staff may withdraw from the project or request that data already collected not be used, until data has been fully anonymised. After this time, it will be impossible to identify and remove the data. Withdrawal will not affect any other relationship with the University of York, EEF, or Commando Joe's.

10. How Will the Findings Be Used?

Findings from this evaluation will be published as an independent EEF evaluation report and made freely available on the EEF website. Participating schools will receive a plain-language summary of the overall results. The results will contribute to the wider evidence base of adventure learning on effective strategies for improving pupil engagement, resilience, and attainment.

11. Who Can I Contact for More Information?

Commando Joe' - Jimmy Thorpe

Email: Project Manager - thorpe.j@commandojoes.co.uk

Managing Director – kelly.d@commandojoes.co.uk

Please direct all enquiries to the project manager who will organise a Teams meeting with you initially to discuss the project in further detail. Ahead of this, please complete the EoI form [Inspire to Achieve - Adventure Learning - Commando Joe's](#)

Places for this project are limited and only confirmed upon signing the MoU.

Department of Education, University of York (Evaluation Team) Department of Education
Email: adventure-learning-education-project@york.ac.uk

For questions about ethical approval or data protection:

- Education Ethics Committee: education-ethics@york.ac.uk
- Data Protection Officer, University of York: dataprotection@york.ac.uk

12. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. How often does the programme run and how long is each session? Answer:

The programme runs **once a week for 24 weeks** across the academic year. Each session lasts **45–60 minutes**, with additional optional lunchtime and after-school activities led by the CJ instructor.

2. How many pupils can take part at one time? Answer:

Groups will include 6 pupils to ensure high-quality support and safe delivery of practical activities. Schools can run multiple cohorts across the year depending on need and timetable capacity.

3. When can sessions take place during the school day? Answer:

Sessions are fully **flexible** and can be timetabled during curriculum lessons, intervention slots, pastoral periods, or inclusion time. Schools choose the slot that causes the least disruption to learning.

4. What does the Commando Joe's instructor provide on site? Answer:

Each school receives a **dedicated, trained CJ instructor** who leads weekly sessions, coordinates equipment, provides programme administrative support as needed, and runs additional lunchtime/after-school activities.

5. What preparation or resources does the school need to provide each week? Answer:

Schools only need to supply a **suitable indoor or outdoor space** and identify the pupils. CJ instructors bring all required equipment, session plans, and risk assessments, and liaise with staff to ensure smooth delivery.

6. What is adventure learning and what other activities count as adventure learning?

For this project, we define adventure learning as: *A group-based intervention programme that involves purposeful experiential learning outcomes in real-world and/or simulated contexts, with components that require physical and emotional challenge, and an element of managed risk and/or uncertainty, which facilitates reflective and collaborative learning.*

In the table below, we identify other school programmes and activities that we consider do and do not meet the definition of adventure learning.

Is adventure learning	Is not adventure learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commando Joe's • Outward Bound Trust • PGL Reach programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duke of Edinburgh Awards • John Muir Award • Other PGL programmes • The Problem-solving Company

7. What are the selection criteria for identifying the 24 pupils to take part?

You should select pupils if they meet the following criteria:

- They are in Year 8 in the academic year 25/26
- They are underperforming academically (Category 1) and at least one of the other criteria (Categories 2–4) described in the table below:

Category	Indicators
Category 1: Academic underperformance	Working below expected progress in English or maths (bottom 30% of cohort in school tracking).
Category 2: Behavioural concerns	Be in the top 33% of the year group for behaviour concerns (e.g., frequently causing low level disruption, frequently removed from class due to poor behaviour, altercations at school involving other pupils, pupil's whose behaviour has not improved in response to behaviour strategies or suspensions)
Category 3: Attendance/engagement risk	0-95% attendance (i.e., "at risk of persistent absence") in the current school year (N.B., Case-by-case basis: Pupils with attendance < 90% can take part if the teacher thinks the pupil can engage)
Category 4: Wellbeing/social-emotional needs	Teacher ratings of low confidence, resilience, or belonging (e.g., bottom 33% of cohort on pastoral survey data, if available). Identified by staff as struggling with peer relationships.
Eligibility for free school meals	We ask that you prioritise pupils eligible for free school meals and ensure that at least 9 of the 24 selected pupils are eligible. (This is not a selection criterion on its own, but a request to support sampling.)

8. Are there any exclusion criteria for pupils?

Pupils should not be selected for the programme if they:

- Are unable to reasonably engage in or sustain participation in a structured session lasting approximately 60 minutes (e.g., due to significant behavioural, emotional, or medical needs that would prevent safe and meaningful participation).
- Have recent involvement with the criminal justice system (e.g., currently subject to youth offending orders or other ongoing legal proceedings).
- Have specific safeguarding circumstances that would make participation in group-based activities inappropriate at this time (e.g., a current safeguarding plan restricting such participation).

9. What are you assessing in the pupil questionnaires?

The pupil questionnaires will measure the following:

- Self-regulation and meta cognition (same questionnaire)
- Student-teacher relationships
- Resilience
- Peer-relations
- Mental wellbeing

10. What information will be given to parents/guardians?

Parents and guardians will be provided with an information sheet and the opportunity to withdraw their child. Schools will need to share these with parents and guardians.

11. What information will you take from the National Pupil Database?

We will primarily access data relating to your pupil's background (FSM eligibility and SEN status), attendance, and attainment (Key Stage 2 English and Maths scores and GCSE Attainment scores).

12. What is the anticipated total staff time on this project?

We anticipate staff time to be primarily made up of the delivery support during the lessons themselves, this will be a supportive role with no planning or administrative tasks for delivery. Prior to the programme starting, it typically takes half a day for the programme lead to liaise with the CJ team in setting up the timetable, working space and other admin tasks for the project. for planning and supporting delivery of the sessions.