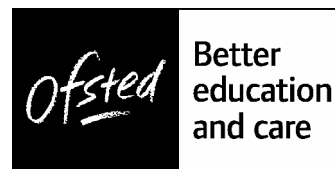


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26 January 2007

Ms Julie Bowman
Headteacher
Malvin's Close First School
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Dear Ms Bowman

Ofsted survey inspection programme: Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 January 2007 to look at your school's curriculum and how innovation contributes to standards and achievement.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, visits to some lessons and observations of the school at work.

Malvin's Close is clearly a remarkable school. The overall effectiveness of the curriculum was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

- In the nursery and reception classes, pupils make rapid progress in all areas of learning.
- Throughout the rest of the school pupils continue to develop extensively crucial skills like concentration, reflection, independence and collaboration. They also get on very well together, thoroughly enjoying school and supporting each other's learning. Their attitudes and behaviour are generally excellent because they want to be in school and conform to its expectations.
- National assessment results at Year 2, and optional tests used by the school in Years 3 and 4, show that standards in English and mathematics

are consistently and significantly above the national average. These results demonstrate exceptionally high achievement by all groups of pupils, as attainment on entry to the school is below average.

- Curriculum leaders monitor all subjects carefully, identifying clearly any issues which might benefit from further development. This monitoring shows that standards are high in all subjects. It is very important to the success of your curriculum that each subject has its significant place and is rigorously led and evaluated.

Quality of curriculum

- Your curriculum is consistently exciting and demanding for the pupils. It is based on a culture of high expectations and a belief that children should be stimulated and excited by learning. It develops skills and attitudes, as well as academic knowledge and understanding, with equal success.
- There is rightly a strong focus on basic skills, such as handwriting and working with number, which helps lead to the exceptional standards. However, this is much more about high quality than quantity of provision, leaving plenty of time for richness and diversity. Time is generally managed very efficiently in accordance with your mantra, 'every second counts'.
- Your curriculum framework has developed over time and, prudently, you keep it as a work in progress. At its heart is 'thinking for learning'. The principles of this are applied consistently throughout the school by all staff, so pupils understand them very well and see how they make their learning relevant. Frequent reviews of learning during lessons, and particularly at the end, are excellent in helping pupils to reflect on what they have achieved.
- Extra curricular and enrichment activities are especially good. The 'Challengers' programme, led by teaching assistants, is brilliant in providing additional stimulating activities for all pupils.
- Exciting activities where pupils work individually or in groups are times of rapid learning. This shows the strength of the curriculum. In some lessons, teachers' talk in the introduction beforehand goes on a little too long, allowing pupils' concentration to dip and reducing time for the activities.

Leadership and management of the curriculum

- Over a number of years, you have shown persistent, resolute and inspiring leadership. You see national test results as an important lever to improvement. You are assured that standards in core subjects are best raised by stimulating the pupils across the whole range of the curriculum.
- You have developed with staff a well thought out philosophy of children's learning, served through the curriculum. High quality discussion, coaching and training means all staff members understand the direction the school is taking. Within this overall direction, they are able to make strong

contributions and take significant responsibility. You are clear, too, about the important supportive but challenging role that your governors play.

- All staff have excellent opportunities to develop their individual skills. Good training is made available and many have nationally recognised qualifications. The interesting educational research being undertaken in school, high level discussion amongst staff, and work with student teachers through the training school and virtual classroom, all make a powerful contribution to staff development.
- School self-evaluation is closely and effectively focused on the impact of initiatives on pupils' learning. Improvement activities are clearly designed to be sustainable. These factors help avoid any falling back, contributing much to the school's consistent improvement.
- You and all the staff are very keen to work with outside agencies and other schools to find and develop new, stimulating ideas. As head teacher, you rightly value the opportunity to work as a school improvement partner in other schools. The range of awards your school has received from external bodies is amazing!

Inclusion

- This is a very inclusive school. All pupils' needs are met well and they are very keen to join in the exciting opportunities the school offers. Standards for all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties, are much higher than national average.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- consider ways of reducing the length of the introductory part of lessons, so that pupils have more time for the activities in the middle section.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the curriculum in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools