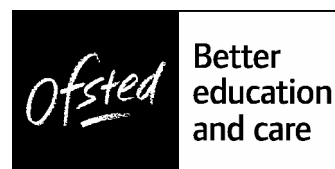


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08 February 2007

Mr Trevor Davies
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Davies

Ofsted survey inspection programme: Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 07 February 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 are 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 and visits to some lessons, seeing the school at work.

The overall effectiveness of the curriculum was judged to be outstanding. The school prepares its pupils extraordinarily well for the next stage of education and their future lives.

Achievement and standards

- Pupils achieve exceptionally well. They make a rapid start in the Foundation Stage and national assessment results are well above average at Key Stage 1. From this high base, pupils continue to make excellent progress in Key Stage 2. Standards are exceptionally high by age 11, with nearly twice the national average proportion of pupils gaining Level 5 or higher in English, mathematics and science.
- Basic skills, such as handwriting and presentation, are promoted consistently well and are of a very high standard.
- Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are exceptionally high. Pupils become very confident and independent in using technology in a wide variety of contexts. Staff have clear evidence of high

standards in all subjects, even though much of the curriculum is taught in themes, not individual subjects.

- In general, pupils are confident, lively and enthusiastic learners who really enjoy school. They understand what they are intended to learn and can evaluate sensibly how well they have done. They are responsive to each other and to adults, listening and contributing well. Behaviour and personal development are excellent.

Quality of curriculum

- There is a clearly stated, innovative and inspiring approach to curriculum planning. You intend that pupils will develop the skills and attitudes they need to thrive in a fast-changing world. In practice, these excellent aims are achieved very well.
- The core of the curriculum is exciting and thoughtfully planned in progressive themes, each of which encompasses most subjects, with a strong international dimension. There are many opportunities for pupils to carry out research, using ICT to support and present their learning. Consistently, across all classes pupils are encouraged to develop their capacity to learn. They understand their ambitious personal targets very well which is a considerable spur to progress.
- One pupil aptly described the thematic approach as a 'flexible ruler', definitely not a 'straight ruler'. This showed well the measurement and rigour within the curriculum as well as the choices and flexibility available both to pupils and staff. Pupils like learning through themes and can see the connections between subjects, and their learning, very readily.
- You and your staff are keen to learn from others outside the school. Ideas such as 'Mantle of the Expert' are developed critically to suit your school's needs.
- The school buildings and facilities have been developed enterprisingly and strategically over the years, so that there is a very stimulating learning environment. Truly no space is wasted; around every corner there is something to inspire and enthuse.
- The range of extra-curricular activities is terrific. Pupils love these and are grateful to the adults who provide them.

Leadership and management of the curriculum

- Over more than twenty years, you have nurtured and led the school to great success, maintaining your personal zest and enthusiasm throughout. This is partly due to your work in support of other schools, internationally and locally. You even find time, as does your deputy, to inspect for Ofsted! This you see as very valuable. Over time, you have rightly developed aspects of your leadership style to suit changing needs. Your clear, encouraging and persistent leadership is rightly admired by the staff, community and pupils.
- Managers at all levels, and especially the leadership team, make an exceptional contribution. They know and support the school's direction

and you fully trust them to make important decisions. They also provide good staff training and are strong exemplars. This is an excellent example of highly effective distributed leadership. All staff are provided with first-rate development opportunities and work hard, making a large and highly effective team.

- Management systems, such as self-evaluation, school improvement planning and performance management are all rigorous and dovetailed closely together, helping to maintain purpose and momentum.
- You work closely with your nearby secondary school and have a well-formed view of how the schools can work together more closely still to develop a seamless curriculum, building on the strengths of both.

Inclusion

- This is a very inclusive school. All groups of pupils enjoy and achieve well. The exciting and rich curriculum inspires pupils with particular gifts and talents. It is also adapted well, where necessary, to suit the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to consider how to structure further opportunities for pupils to understand the different world cultures and religions represented locally; and to consider whether it might be advantageous to offer a non-European language alongside French
- to include within the school's excellent statement of curriculum aims and philosophy a fuller summary of how the school meets the particular needs of the community in Balsall Common.

Neither of these areas indicates any particular weakness; rather they are suggestions of how strengths may be further built upon.

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