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Mrs Jane Martin
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Martin

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Curriculum Innovation

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14-15 June 2007. At the end of the visit I fed back my conclusions and this letter confirms those findings.

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.

Context and background

Harewood Junior School has worked as a member of the Gloucester Education Achievement Zone (EAZ) and now as a member of the Gloucester Excellence Cluster. As part of this work the school was a founder member of a group of schools which developed the 'city curriculum'. This is a carefully planned thematic approach to the curriculum which is designed to stimulate children's creativity and arouse their natural curiosity. Much of the pupils' learning is centred around a number of themes which integrate work in a range of subject areas.

The school has also been working this term with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) on a 'Futures in Action' pilot curriculum project which involves a Year 4 class. Here, pupils have a high degree of

responsibility and control over both how and what they learn. They work with the teacher at the beginning of a unit to formulate the 'key questions' that need to be answered as part of their work. They are then directly involved in planning and organising the resulting learning activities.

Achievement and standards and personal development

Pupils enter the school with standards that are close to the national average. The 2006 national test results suggest that pupils made satisfactory progress and attained average standards. However, a range of evidence seen during the inspection demonstrates that pupils are making considerable progress in their learning and attaining high standards. The school's curriculum makes a very strong contribution to this progress and to pupils' personal development. As it is so interesting and engaging, pupils work hard and want to produce high quality work. Behaviour in lessons is very good and pupils are extremely positive about school. The curriculum provides strong support for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It also offers many opportunities for pupils to develop skills that underpin good learning, like confidence, team work, independence and planning.

Pupils' achievement and personal development are particularly good in the Year 4 pilot project lessons. Here, pupils plan their own learning confidently and work very well in teams to achieve their aims. They concentrate and work effectively for long, extended periods of time. Pupils are able to talk about how much they enjoy this new approach to learning and about the ways in which it is helping them to develop academically and personally.

Teaching, learning and the curriculum

The school's innovative approach to the curriculum over the past few years has produced a structure and approach that meets pupils' needs well. The curriculum engages pupils' interest and makes a very positive contribution to their learning and personal development. Close links to the local community and environment ensure that the curriculum is relevant to pupils and that it offers opportunities to learn outside the classroom. The curriculum helps pupils to develop both general skills for learning and specific skills in different subjects. However, opportunities to assess and monitor pupils' progress in developing these skills are less well developed.

Teachers are enthusiastic and committed to the school's model of curriculum delivery. They work very hard to develop exciting and engaging curriculum opportunities and resources. The teaching and learning observed during the inspection was all at least good. Particular strengths of teaching include thorough and imaginative planning, very positive relationships, extensive use of ICT and good support for individual pupils. The way in which teachers organise their classrooms and use the environment to stimulate curiosity also makes a very strong contribution to pupils' learning and progress.

The learning in the Year 4 pilot project lessons is particularly impressive. Here the children have a high degree of control over the content and organisation of their lessons. They respond well and make considerable progress.

Leadership and management of the curriculum

You have a strong, clear vision for the development of the curriculum which staff across the school subscribe to and share. You have successfully developed an environment that encourages staff to innovate. The city curriculum approach has been skilfully led over the years and the innovation is now well established. The school has a reflective approach to innovation. While keen to innovate further, leaders always evaluate the success of any new development very carefully.

Inclusion

The school's curriculum structure makes a strong contribution to inclusion, as it interests and motivates all pupils very well and enables them to make progress. Lessons observed during the inspection demonstrated effective inclusion of all learners.

Overall

Strengths:

- the city curriculum has a strong motivational effect. As a result, children behave very well and have a positive attitude to learning
- the curriculum helps children to become confident and skilled learners
- pupils are able to work well independently and in groups
- the classroom environment is used very well to stimulate interest and promote learning
- the local environment and community are used to make learning engaging and relevant
- highly effective collaborative work between local schools provides strong support for curriculum innovation
- the pilot project work is making a considerable contribution to pupils' learning and personal development

Issues for consideration:

- look at ways to develop and extend the approaches used in the Year 4 pilot project
- further develop ways to assess and measure progression in pupils' general and subject specific skills

- look at ways in which the city curriculum approach can be used to provide greater support for pupils' performance in the national tests.

I do hope you find these comments useful. I look forward to being updated about current developments as you continue with your curriculum innovation.

Yours sincerely

Christopher Russell
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools