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03 July 2007

Mrs Mary Priestley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Priestley

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Learning Outside the Classroom (LOTIC)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18-19 June 2007 to look at the way that learning outside the classroom contributes to your school's curriculum and to pupils' achievement and personal development.

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, a governor and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work and displays; visits to some lessons and activities and seeing the school at work.

The overall effectiveness of the contribution made by learning outside the classroom to the curriculum was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards, including personal development

- Standards by age 11 in English, mathematics and science are consistently significantly above average. In Key Stage 1, standards are also above average but the pattern has been less consistent from year to year. You have sound evidence that the overall progress made by pupils through the school is good and improving further.

- Pupils really enjoy their learning and their overall personal development and well-being is at a high level. They are very sensitive to the needs of others, confident in lessons and discussions, as well as polite and respectful. They are very keen to talk about their learning, stating clearly that they think the considerable number of activities they do outside the classroom contribute much to their education. One pupil summed this up by saying, 'Seeing for yourself, is so much better than hearing about it.'

Quality of teaching and learning within LOTC

- All that I observed directly, or evaluated through discussion and looking at planning and pupils' work, shows that the quality of teaching and learning supporting learning outside the classroom is at least good and often outstanding.
- Teaching related to LOTC promotes pupils' independence very well, and enthuses and actively involves them. The learning is very rich as a result.
- There are positive and trusting relationships between adults and pupils which also contribute much. Adults in supporting roles, including teaching assistants and parents, make a very important contribution. They know what is expected of them and work effectively with groups, but without ever dominating, so pupils make many choices and decisions for themselves. Sometimes, teaching assistants miss opportunities to ask pupils higher order or more 'open' questions, which could help develop their thinking further still.
- In Reception, pupils move seamlessly from indoor to outdoor tasks in most weathers, which helps their learning significantly. Their outdoor area is safe, exciting and planned very well to stimulate imagination and learning.

Quality of the contribution made by LOTC to the curriculum

- The curriculum is planned carefully and creatively and is currently being sensibly adapted. LOTC activities, of many different kinds, are included very well with a clear and rigorous rationale about how they can bring learning to life, raise standards, and enable pupils to remember their learning. The school grounds are used extensively and imaginatively in many subjects, as are places of interest, far afield and more local (such as Ryarsh Wood, where all pupils have contributed to making some wonderful natural sculptures).
- A member of staff said, 'The classroom is just a room at the end of the day – you don't have to have the lesson there just because...' This indicates the thoughtful and innovative approach taken.
- Pupils are involved very productively in planning topics through the 'Planning Together' process. This gives a real sense of ownership to the pupils and, through this, they have helped initiate some good LOTC activities.

- The school has a strong tradition of residential visits and outdoor pursuits. The small number of pupils not attending these are supported well in school through other forms of LOTC.
- You run a good range of popular extra-curricular activities, with suitable procedures to assure their quality, as some are provided externally. You would like to extend the variety of clubs further.

Leadership and management of LOTC

- You give an outstanding lead in encouraging an innovative and rounded curriculum in which LOTC is a key part. In your year in post, you have done much to enhance further the life of the school, including involving and empowering all staff, creating a real sense of shared belonging and ownership. This carries through well into the strategic plan. The new school slogan, 'Forward Thinking for a Brighter Future' rings very true.
- You have begun to evaluate the contribution made by LOTC activities, including by finding out pupils' views. So far, this analysis, whilst helpful, is more descriptive than evaluative.
- Governors are fully supportive of the high value placed on LOTC, whilst being conscious of the financial costs. They oversee rigorous health and safety procedures and risk assessments for LOTC, as well as asking helpfully about the educational purposes of these activities.

Inclusion

- Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) have full access to all activities within the curriculum. This is explicitly referred to in the equal opportunities policy which is currently under revision.
- In respect of extra curricular activities, you analyse participation by overall numbers, gender and LDD and you are beginning to use this analysis to check that there are genuine equal opportunities. This issue is not, however, mentioned in the current policy.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that giving equal access to extra-curricular activities is explicitly included when the equal opportunities policy is revised; and that the take up of these activities by different groups of pupils is monitored to check that no pupils miss out unduly
- developing further the good work of teaching assistants by providing additional training for them in using higher order questioning.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop 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