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Mr G Storey
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Storey

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 16 October 2007 to look at the way that learning outside the classroom contributes to your school's curriculum and to students' 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 and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation and analysis of students' 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

- Achievement and standards are consistently high. The school can demonstrate that a major contributing factor is the range of activities outside the classroom which add significant value to lessons in all subjects.
- The many opportunities offered to students for learning outside the classroom mean that they are extremely well prepared for the future. For example, they take a very active part in the life of the community and demonstrate a particularly responsible attitude to their own health and safety.
- Students spoken with thoroughly enjoy school; opportunities to learn outside the classroom make a major contribution to this. As one student reported, "There is something for everyone".

- Students are very well prepared for work and college by the well organised weekly work experience in Years 10 and 11.
- Many students take part enthusiastically in the extensive range of sporting and creative arts activities on offer. Standards are high, and many students are inspired to pursue their interests independently.
- Activities to help students make a smooth transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 are carefully thought through. The inclusive range of activities for learning outside the classroom helps to ensure that there is no dip in achievement at the end of Key Stage 3.

Quality of teaching and learning within LOTC

- Learning outside the classroom is successfully integrated into all subjects because teachers strongly value the contribution the activities make to students' learning.
- Teachers ensure very well that planning of activities inside and outside the classroom are made to dovetail which ensures linked and seamless learning.
- Well-targeted extra-curricular activities accelerate students' progress in maths and English.
- Students strongly appreciate the variety of practical learning activities outside the classroom which complement their work in class.

Quality of the contribution made by LOTC to the curriculum

- Learning outside the curriculum makes an outstanding contribution to the curriculum. It is perceived by the school as a key element to students' achievement and personal development and happens very successfully in practice.
- The extensive range extra-curricular activities cater for a wide diversity of personal interests and differing needs of students. Most students take part in such activities and by Year 9 all are involved in a residential visit.
- The many well organised residential visits enrich students' understanding in a number of subjects, such as history and geography. They encourage interest, independence and self-motivation.
- Strong community partnerships, and an extensive use of the schools resources by the community in the evenings, give many students further excellent opportunities to pursue their interests.
- Interest and excitement in some subjects, engendered by activities out of the classroom, lead to students pursuing them for GCSE and A level qualifications.
- The school library helps students to develop research skills in a number of subjects and it actively and successfully encourages reading for pleasure.
- You have developed a wide range of strong partnerships with local colleges, businesses, clubs and other schools to enhance opportunities for LOTC.
- The school has taken effective measures to overcome some of the barriers to learning outside the classroom, such as health and safety concerns. However, you are concerned about other barriers such as the pressure on young staff with many responsibilities; the potentially divisive issues involved with paying staff to do extra curricular activities and the disruption to the timetable which can occur when LOTC activities take place.

- Students report that business enterprise competitions have been invaluable in raising standards in the GCSE business studies course. Business Enterprise is creating links with a number of curriculum departments but is not sufficiently embedded, so that not all subjects are taking shared responsibility for it.
- Despite the good examples generally in the school, opportunities for some students in the sixth form to take part in physical exercise are insufficient.

Leadership and management of LOTC

- You have a very clear philosophy of education in which LOTC is perceived as intrinsic to the curriculum. This has resulted in a very strong sense of common purpose amongst the whole school community.
- You are ably supported by an excellent team which gives time freely to enrich and enhance the learning of students.
- A well developed management structure in which school leaders regularly monitor the work of their teams ensures that all activities involved in learning outside the classroom are of a high standard.
- Effective processes for preparing for LOTC mean that health and safety requirements are met and appropriately ratified by governors.
- The annual audit of LOTC means that school leaders know much about the contribution this kind of learning makes to students' personal development, wellbeing and achievement.
- The excellent school newsletters promote the wide range of activities students take part in, and regularly celebrate their success.

Inclusion

- You have successfully overcome financial barriers to ensure that all students can participate in activities.
- The Buddy Club and residential visits to the Lake District are successful in supporting students who find school a challenge.
- All students take part successfully in work experience. This is particularly valuable for some students in Years 10 and 11 who find school work challenging. It ensures that they are well prepared for the future.
- You offer a range of targeted LOTC which ensure that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those that are gifted and talented, can make the most of their opportunities in school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that Business Enterprise is fully integrated into the curriculum
- finding ways to offer more sporting opportunities to the sixth form students.

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 and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector