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Mr R Haylock
Principal
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Dear Mr Haylock

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

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 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, analysis of students' work and visits to some lessons and activities, seeing the school at work.

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

Achievement and standards, including personal development

- A good range of LOTC opportunities has helped to maintain good overall achievement. In particular, students' understanding is enhanced considerably in some subjects, such as history and geography, because of the interesting and motivating contribution made by good fieldwork and visits out.
- A broad range of extra curricular activities and residential visits, such as The Duke of Edinburgh Award prepares a significant minority of students very well for the future.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and vulnerable students feel safe, happy and involved partly because of extra-curricular

activities such as the 'Bio club' which allow them to achieve success and build their self-esteem.

- Initiatives such as The Duke of Edinburgh Awards, the study of geography in the local community, charity activities and those where students take responsibility for arranging school events ensure that students are enabled to make a good contribution to the community.

Quality of teaching and learning within LOTC

- Teachers of history and geography fully exploit a planned programme of field work to make lessons back in the classroom interesting and particularly relevant, thereby improving the rate of progress students make. In other subjects, including science and design technology, the use of learning outside the classroom, whilst worthwhile, is not as well established or effective.
- Some A level courses make good use of opportunities for learning outside the classroom to develop students' skills and understanding by working with other professionals.
- Learning outside the classroom enables staff and students to work together in a particularly enjoyable and supportive context, thereby helping build the good relationships which exist.

Quality of the contribution made by learning outside the classroom to the curriculum

- Learning outside the classroom makes a good contribution to the curriculum overall. However, where it is planned as an intrinsic part of the subject, such as in history and geography, its contribution to the curriculum is outstanding.
- The Duke of Edinburgh Award makes an outstanding contribution to the personal development and well-being of the students involved.
- The school offers a good range of activities such as residential events and day trips that are linked well to many subjects of the curriculum.
- The school incorporates Business Enterprise in the curriculum to a reasonable extent although some aspects, such as finance, are not yet fully integrated in this.
- Exciting opportunities to exhibit art work and create films are offered in the sixth form which give students a valuable insight into the standards, expectations and challenges in linked professions.
- A good range of activities in sports clubs and creative arts enables students to develop leisure pursuits and interests for themselves.
- Although almost half the students are involved in extra curricular activities, short lunch times and difficulties with transport create a barrier to some students who may want to become involved.
- The school has established good links with a range of partners to support activities outside the classroom. For example, the school worked in partnership with Broxtowe Borough council when organising Chinese New Year celebrations. Students gained the support of many professional organisations when making a film which was premiered in a local cinema.

Leadership and management of LOTC

- You firmly believe in empowering staff and students to become involved in learning outside the classroom.
- Audits of provision and student evaluations, including some through the school council, are being successfully used to improve these opportunities by showing areas of success and those needing some further improvement.
- Year leaders work hard to provide pastoral and social activities. For example in Year 9 tutor groups benefit from a varied diet, including competitions, computer work and library visits.
- Very good systems and procedures for ensuring health and safety and assessing risk are in place. However, some staff see the bureaucracy involved as a disincentive to taking part. Nevertheless, many staff are involved in leading aspects of learning outside the classroom, demonstrating a strong belief in its importance to students' achievement and well being.

Inclusion

- Thoughtful planning of field trips in geography and history ensure that all students take part. This ensures that all have the opportunity to make rapid progress, which most do.
- You have successfully overcome financial barriers to ensure all students can participate in learning outside the classroom.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing more opportunities for learning outside the classroom in some curriculum areas such as science and design technology
- exploring ways to increase the numbers who take part in extra-curricular activities
- integrating all aspects of business enterprise into the curriculum.

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

Tim Bristow
Her Majesty's Inspector