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Mrs Elaine Silson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Silson

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 Friday 12 October 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 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 outstanding.

Achievement and standards, including personal development

- The majority of students enter the school with average levels of attainment for their age. They make excellent progress at Key Stage 3 and gain above average results in the national tests at the end of Year 9. Provisional results for 2007 indicate that there has been a slight dip in achievement at Key Stage 3 this year but you have a clear picture of what needs to be undertaken to remedy this situation.
- The 2007 GCSE results were the best ever for the school and are above national averages. Results at AS/A Level were more disappointing but a broad range of strategies is in place to raise students' achievement in the sixth form.
- The personal development of the students is excellent. Students are well mannered and respectful. They enjoy coming to school as evidenced by their very good behaviour, improved attendance and the fall in the number of exclusions.

Students also mix well and the promotion of racial and inter-faith harmony is outstanding.

- Students are willing to engage in discussion and can articulate clearly the impact LOTC has upon their learning and personal development. They particularly enjoyed the residential experience undertaken in Key Stage 3 and you have developed a clear rationale for moving this activity to the first term of Year 8.
- You work to ensure that a balance of learning outside and inside the classroom is provided. As a result, learning outside the classroom enhances significantly what goes on within the classrooms.
- Learning outside the classroom activities are formally evaluated by staff who led them and, through analysis of subject questionnaires and focus group comments, you can point to the way in which these learning activities have enhanced the personal development of students. You can also identify the contribution LOTC makes to learning, and the monitoring and evaluation of the impact upon achievement and standards is particularly well developed in some subjects but not all.

Quality of teaching and learning within LOTC

- In the lessons visited, students displayed excellent attitudes to learning. Teaching was engaging and students were responding well. This was particularly evident in the Year 7 'Super Learning Day' and in the Year 10 session on raising student awareness about knives and other dangerous weapons.
- The planning, preparation and follow up activities for LOTC are thorough. In personal and social education (PSE), for example, such learning is well integrated into schemes of work. In modern foreign languages, student feedback questionnaires on activities outside school help staff to develop future plans. This is outstanding practice.
- Discussions with staff and students, and displays around the school reveal the wide range of learning outside the classroom in many subjects. One student observed, LOTC helps to bring 'learning to life'. For another it was better to 'see rather than listen'. Students from all year groups thought learning outside the classroom 'helped their understanding' and enjoyed the practical nature of many of the activities. Several felt that LOTC meant that they also had 'more fresh air'!
- Learning outside the classroom is reported by departments in a variety of ways. The school magazine 'Allerton Eye', for example, showcases the plethora of activities which take place and illustrates the enthusiasm of the students involved.

Quality of the contribution made by LOTC to the curriculum

- The curriculum is carefully designed and developed to meet the needs and interests of the students. The range of academic, vocational and work related opportunities is extensive and students appreciate this. You work with a number of providers and partnerships especially at Key Stage 4 to create and deliver the best provision for your students. You carefully monitor the quality of off-site provision.

- All students in each year group are involved in a range of activities for learning outside the classroom.. The activities are carefully monitored and whole school systems for checking participation are being appropriately developed.
- There is an extensive and successful range of clubs and opportunities outside school hours which are greatly valued by students.
- Although there is a strong commitment to a wide range of opportunities for learning outside the classroom, whole school documentation and information, such as the school prospectus and website, do not fully reflect how important LOTC actually is for students at the school.
- Specialist status, as a Business and Enterprise college, links well with local needs and is having an outstanding impact upon the development of LOTC. A range of visits, visitors and activities for each year group and for targeted groups of students is extremely successful in enhancing students' personal development and their learning skills. These opportunities are also developing enterprise and financial capabilities as well as deepening economic and business understanding.

Leadership and management of LOTC

- You have a strong belief and commitment to learning outside the classroom and how it can contribute to learning for all students. This enthusiasm is shared by your senior leadership colleagues and by your middle leaders, many of whom are like you extremely passionate about the benefits that LOTC brings.
- You have a clear rationale for the need for balance between learning outside the classroom and learning within the classroom, especially for students preparing for public examinations in Year 9 and above.
- You are also aware of the possible barriers to participation but you work effectively to deal with these, ensuring, for example that costs do not prohibit involvement.
- The administration of LOTC is managed skilfully by the educational visits co-ordinator. Planning is thorough and procedures for health and safety and for risk assessment are followed assiduously. All current safeguarding procedures are in place. Parents are well informed and you adhere closely to the local authority's policy and guidelines.
- Overall the leadership and management of LOTC are excellent. You and your senior colleagues give a firm steer in relation to LOTC. You have a clear vision of its role and value for the students and of the importance of developing further the monitoring and evaluation of the wide range of LOTC activities which you undertake.

Inclusion

- You lead an extremely inclusive school in which the needs of all students are a priority for you and your staff.
- The school works hard to maintain a calm and orderly environment where students work and socialise in a harmonious way.
- The student voice is strong, with students from all key stages feeling that they are listened to. The discussion observed in the school council meeting indicated the

extent to which the students are being consulted and involved in the planning for the new buildings.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing further the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of learning outside the classroom on students' achievement and personal development
- revising documentation to reflect the whole school philosophy about learning outside the classroom and to reinforce its value to the school and the 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 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

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector