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Mr I Blaikie  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Blaikie

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 with Joanne Marshall on 15 - 16 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 senior leaders, staff, pupils and governors, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and brief visits to a wide range of lessons and activities.

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

- Students enter the school with above average levels of attainment and make good and often excellent progress during Key Stages 3 and 4. As a consequence they reach very high standards in the national tests and in GCSE examinations.
- Sixth form students start with marginally above average standards due to the high percentage of students transferring from a family of non-selective local high schools. Overall they achieve exceptional standards due to outstanding leadership and provision.
- Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. In discussions their attitudes are impressive; most are able to articulate eloquently and confidently about the wealth of innovative, exciting experiences on offer for learning outside the classroom. Most crucially, all possess a clear understanding of how these excellent learning opportunities help them to achieve the laudable

Alcester Grammar aim; to be 'stimulated, inspired, fulfilled and, above all, happy young people'.

- Several of your students talked with feeling about how aspects of their learning outside school had influenced their lives for the better and helped prepare them for the next stage of education. One remarked, 'the trip to Honduras enabled me to step out of my culture; it increased my awareness of taking responsibility for environmental issues'.
- Your students manifested exceptional levels of courtesy and respect for adults and their peers.

#### Quality of teaching and learning within LOTC

- Your students say that they are taught by 'passionate specialists who love their subject'. Teachers work exceptionally hard to provide the best education for the students in their care. They are not complacent and their efforts to improve further creative approaches to teaching and learning across the school are commendable.
- Recent improvements in the use of film and digital media in many departments are innovative and imaginative. The films produced by the students, capturing the impressive range of LOTC on offer during the successful Rag and Block weeks, exemplify success in your aim to develop creativity across the curriculum.
- In the sample of observed lessons and activities relationships were excellent; expectations were high; teaching was lively, stimulating and motivating. The use of assessment for learning at the start of a food technology lesson was practice at its very best.

#### Quality of the contribution made by LOTC to the curriculum

- Over the years the school has developed a reputation for curriculum innovation built on the school's view that learning outside the classroom extends learning horizons. You capitalise expertly on what is available in the local community, nationally and beyond, for example in partnerships with local schools, universities, professional artists, business,, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra together with your extensive international work.
- The number of international trips encompassing many European, Asian countries and the United States of America is impressive. It is apparent that these 'life changing' opportunities are integrated successfully into the curriculum and evaluated rigorously to ensure maximum academic and personal value for the students.
- The school's specialist performing arts status is making a significant contribution to learning outside the classroom. There is a wealth of activities to enrich the students' spiritual and cultural development and every effort is made to give the students access to galleries, museums and theatres to deepen their artistic appreciation of animation, art, dance, drama, film, literature, digital media and music. Employing artists in residence to work regularly alongside teachers and students is making an important contribution to raising standards and expectations of what students can achieve. 'The Bigger Picture' portraiture project is a stunning testament to this.

- The range of clubs and opportunities for the students to learn outside of school hours is impressive, as is student participation which you monitor by attendance and gender to ensure different groups of students are included. These opportunities are valued greatly by students and serve their academic, artistic and sporting interests well.

#### Leadership and management of LOTC

- Working closely with your senior team and others you have developed an excellent and appropriate philosophy for learning to meet the needs of Alcester Grammar students, based upon a clear vision underpinned by sound research evidence. You have used the school's values to drive curriculum innovation over several years with imagination and real inspiration.
- You and your senior team provide clear direction to the work of the school which informs an enthusiastic staff.
- School improvement is underpinned by excellent staff training. Monitoring and evaluation at all levels is rigorous ensuring a clear sense of purpose in introducing new opportunities for learning, a willingness to take risks and revisiting and refining where initiatives have not been wholly successful. The school involves students their parents and carers in this process.
- The coordination and planning of the programme for learning outside the classroom are meticulous and monitored carefully by senior leaders and governors.

#### Inclusion

- Alcester Grammar is a harmonious and welcoming community in which students thrive and adults want to be. Students I spoke with felt that their individuality was celebrated and nurtured, that their voice matters and helps make a difference for the better.
- Older students reported that the transition to the sixth form from other schools was seamless so that they felt included immediately.
- You operate a sensitive system to provide financial support to students to ensure cost does not preclude participation.

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

Mary Harlow  
Her Majesty's Inspector