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07 December 2007

Mr D Thornton
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Dear Mr Thornton

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 Thursday 6 December 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

- The majority of students enter the school with average attainment though many have poor literacy skills. Overall they make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 and provisional results for 2007 indicate that standards have risen especially in English.
- Progress at Key Stage 4 is good. The 2007 GCSE results were the best ever for the school and the proportion of students attaining five subjects at the higher grades is above the national average.

- Students' behaviour on my visit was good. I observed many examples of students being polite and well mannered. They clearly enjoy school and are well-motivated.
- Students talk willingly about the impact work outside the classroom has upon their learning and personal development. They particularly enjoy the 'Activity Days' and the 'Community Days' and can say how learning outside of the classroom has helped improve their motivation, as well as their ability to work in groups and their confidence in performing in front of their peers. They also noted how activities outside the classroom had broadened their horizons in relation to career opportunities.
- The activities in LOTC are formally evaluated by staff who lead them. Through student questionnaires and staff evaluations, you can point to the way in which LOTC has enhanced the personal development of students in particular. The monitoring and evaluation of the impact of such learning upon achievement and standards, though, is underdeveloped, as is the involvement of the students in this process.

Quality of teaching and learning within LOTC

- In the lessons visited, students displayed good attitudes to learning. Teaching was engaging and students were responding well.
- The planning, preparation and follow up activities for LOTC are thorough, and this is particularly to be seen in the work linked to GCSE courses. In media, for example, the students could explain how the skills learned on their visit to the Museum of Film, Photography and Television in Bradford had helped them back in the classroom. In history, student feedback questionnaires on activities outside the classroom had been pivotal in helping staff to develop future plans. However, this good practice is not universal.
- Students' experiences of learning outside the classroom are recorded and shared in a variety of ways. The school newsletter 'Farra News', the extensive displays around the school and the comprehensive folders of evidence, including photographs and DVDs, reveal the plethora of activities which take place and the enthusiasm of the students involved. Students think LOTC helps develop their knowledge, understanding and skills and they particularly enjoy the 'practical' nature of many of the activities. They also spoke of how these activities helped them to have greater self-esteem and to raise their aspirations.

Quality of the contribution made by LOTC to the curriculum

- You have a clear rationale that places LOTC as an integral and essential part of the curriculum. All subjects are involved in a range of activities outside the classroom for each year group. There is no differentiation between learning outside and inside the classroom; the emphasis is just upon learning and upon encouraging your staff to use the most appropriate strategies. This helps to explain the improving achievement made by the students.

- The curriculum is carefully designed and developed to meet the needs and interests of the students. The range of opportunities is extensive and the students appreciate this. The Young Apprenticeship courses are making a particularly effective contribution to engaging students at Key Stage 4 both at school and in their work placements.
- LOTC activities are well planned with follow-up work identified for future lessons. This is shown in the very useful overview summary you produced in which staff in each subject area provided evidence in answer to a series of questions notably, 'What happens in the classroom to reinforce this learning experience?'
- There is an extensive and successful range of clubs and opportunities for students outside school hours. Participation is recorded but whole-school systems for evaluating this data are not in place.

Leadership and management of LOTC

- You are passionate about improving learning and raising achievement and in using LOTC as a means of accomplishing this. This enthusiasm and commitment is shared by your senior leadership colleagues and by the middle leaders and classroom teachers I interviewed, all of whom displayed a belief and commitment to LOTC.
- You and your colleagues are aware of the possible barriers to participation but you work hard to deal with these; by offering a range of opportunities and providing financial support as needed, for example, you ensure that costs do not prohibit involvement.
- The administration of external visits is comprehensively managed by the educational visits co-ordinator and his team. Planning is thorough and procedures for health and safety and for risk assessment are fully 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 good, with you and your senior colleagues giving a firm steer. 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 inclusive school in which the needs of all students are a priority for you and your staff.
- Students are encouraged to participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities which are on offer and their participation is carefully monitored. The evaluation of that involvement, however, is underdeveloped.
- The student voice is strong and the students feel that they are consulted and listened to, though this view was expressed more confidently by students in Key Stage 4 than those in Key Stage 3. The opportunity for

two senior students to sit on the Governing Body is much appreciated by the students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing further the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of LOTC on students' achievement and personal development
- involving students more effectively in the formal evaluation of how LOTC contributes to their learning and achievement and use this to refine what is offered.

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