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Mr J Winch
Principal
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Dear Mr Winch

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

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, students and director during my visit with Robin Hammerton HMI on 5 December 2007 to look at the way in which 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, a director and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation and brief visits to some lessons and extra-curricular 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

- The attainment profile of students when they are accepted for the school mirrors the normal distribution. Your work with students prior to admission, including admitting a small group for their last two terms in Year 6, contributes to the progress they make by the beginning of Year 7 when overall attainment is above average. Students make excellent progress during their time at the school and consistently achieve very high standards indeed. GCSE results are very significantly above the national average, with nine out of ten students achieving five or more higher-grade

passes, including English and mathematics and two-thirds of academic A-level passes being at a Grade A or B.

- Students' attitudes and behaviour observed on our visit were exemplary. They were courteous, polite, safe and very aware of the needs of others. They appreciate, as one student said, the 'opportunities for life' that they are given and the huge commitment that staff make to this. In discussion, they are clear that LOTC contributes much to their academic learning, confidence, skills and personal development and well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning within LOTC

- LOTC is used very well to enrich teaching and learning across the curriculum. Many staff plan worthwhile visits to deepen students' learning and bring their subjects to life. Other trips are planned with a broader focus, for example to develop students' team working skills.
- LOTC is well used to provide additional teaching for students where concerns about progress have been raised through your rigorous tracking process. For example, the English twilight sessions and 'Super Maths' days provided effective support for students at risk of not achieving a higher grade pass in English or mathematics at GCSE.
- Lessons visited around the college indicated that students are well-motivated by, and responsive to, the teaching they receive both in and out of the classroom. Extra-curricular activities visited at the end of the day showed clearly that there is an unrelenting focus on high quality teaching and learning. For example, students were being taught new skills in sports clubs and were being supported in their learning in the homework club. Musical activities, for example, in the choir, showed excellent practice in students, staff and parents learning together as a community.

Quality of the contribution made by LOTC to the curriculum

- The college provides a rich and extensive LOTC programme within the curriculum and through its popular range of extra-curricular activities, with half of students attending at least one of these. You also value those activities which students take part in outside of school which you do not provide yourselves. All departments promote and use learning which takes place outside the classroom. Day and residential visits are used very well to support individual subjects. They are thoroughly planned and closely and carefully linked to the overall curriculum. All students studying the relevant subject take part and value them highly. There are good examples of effective use of the local environment, particularly in geography, although there is potential to develop its use further.
- Beyond the academic curriculum there are examples of good practice in offering alternative curriculum provision through BTEC awards and modern apprenticeships.
- Students talk clearly about the powerful nature of the learning outside lessons and the way it helps them to apply and understand better their learning from within the classroom. They are clear that it also gives them excellent opportunities for service to the school and community. This is

very important to them and helps them to make decisions about course options and their future careers.

- This notable spirit of service to others shows how the curriculum in its broadest sense reflects strongly, and to great effect, the school's Christian foundation.
- Learning outside lessons makes a very good contribution to students' personal development and well being, including all five outcomes of 'Every Child Matters'. For example, students welcome and take on board what they see as high-quality advice through activities such as the healthy living week.

Leadership and management of LOTC

- You have a very clear educational philosophy, based on the college's Christian foundation, which is seen throughout the school. Learning outside the classroom is an integral part. It is important to you that students develop strength of character as well as achieving their personal best. LOTC contributes greatly to this. This is emphasised through the inclusion of an evaluation of students' contribution to extra-curricular activities and participation in work experience within their annual reports.
- LOTC is managed very well. Staff are provided with in-house training to enable them to deal with the practicalities of organising activities and to ensure the experiences are educationally valuable. High priority is placed on meeting health and safety requirements.
- You gather some information about LOTC through tutor reports, visit forms and registers of participation in extra-curricular activities, and you evaluate the impact of some individual activities on students' achievement and attitudes to learning. You also point rightly to the outstanding achievement and standards and students' high levels of personal development as proof of the success of LOTC. However, you do not analyse participation in activities, for example by different groups of students, or collate qualitative evidence about LOTC, including that from the students and parents.

Inclusion

- The school has a welcoming and inclusive Christian ethos. There is a very strong commitment to, and knowledge of, each individual student. This manifests itself in tailoring LOTC activities to match students' strengths or needs. Whilst not all activities are open to all students, this detailed knowledge of individuals leads to equality of access to appropriate activities.
- There is evidence that access to most activities outside the classroom is fair, with cost not being a limiting factor. However, the limitations in the self-evaluation of extra-curricular activities mean that you cannot prove that access to such activities is fully equitable or identify completely any barriers to some students' participation.
- Where LOTC opportunities are provided for groups during the school day, care is taken to ensure that these sessions are rotated so that students do not miss the same lessons each time. Similarly, students know that if they

miss lessons to take part in a visit or other activity it is their responsibility to make up any missed learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing more systematic self-evaluation of all activities involving learning outside the classroom, which includes the views of students, parents and staff, bringing together key messages to inform further improvements.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop learning outside the classroom.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey
Her Majesty's Inspector