

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr A Lole
Headteacher
Mulberry Bush School
Abingdon Road
Standlake
Witney
OX29 7RW

Dear Mr Lole

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in promoting equality

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff at Mulberry Bush School, during my visit on the 01 October 2008 to look at work in promoting equality.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, telephone interviews with parents and carers, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and school council and assembly observations of four lessons.

The quality of provision to promote equalities is outstanding.

Features of good practice observed

- Pupils of all abilities make better than expected progress in relation to their capability and starting points, because of very good teamwork and teaching in the school.
- The school makes good use of cross curricular activities so pupils can achieve and make progress, for example through the Forest School programme.
- Classes are divided according to the child's development point rather than by chronological age. There are three stages for classes, with pupils progressing through the school when they reach emotional and developmental milestones, not dependent on length of time at Mulberry Bush. This system is also reflected in the boarding house provision where pupils make progress through three stages. The impact of this is that children have a greater understanding of

themselves and their emotional states, meaning they are more fully prepared when they make the transition to their next school.

- The school council is pupil led and makes a genuine contribution to the school community by making real decisions which impact the whole school. Expectations of those pupils are very high and they demonstrate excellent relationships, conducive to personal development, with both their peers and adults who facilitate the process.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to receive praise and recognition, for example in well run assemblies that are opportunities for celebration. Pupils demonstrate increased self esteem and growing confidence as they take it in turns to play musical instruments, sing, dance, and receive positive praise and certificates from an appreciative audience of their peers and adults in the school.
- Staff training is outstanding, with development opportunities across the school ranging from half day in-house inset to an in-house HEFC funded Foundation Degree course run in conjunction with the University of the West of England offered to all staff. As a result there is a strong interdisciplinary approach to working from all staff including management, teachers, family team workers, and household managers.
- The school looks for ways to improve practice in a rigorous and objective fashion, for example one House is leading a pilot project aiming to reduce incidents of restraint through debriefing methods which will be evaluated by an outside agency.
- Support structures, including daily review meetings, look at underlying causes of anxiety-evoking behaviours from children and the part adults play in that. As a result staff feel supported and can deal more effectively with extreme behaviour. Children are helped to adopt more positive coping strategies, so they can ultimately return to mainstream schooling.
- The school works exceptionally well with partners to provide positive transition experiences for children, many of whom have experienced multiple placements before attending Mulberry Bush. Transition to mainstream is carefully planned, with children being allocated previously vetted pen-friends in their new school, who then act as buddies when Mulberry Bush children progress to their next school. Transition happens gradually with visits to the new school arranged for different times of the school day and for different activities so that the children are fully prepared when they finally leave Mulberry Bush. Receiving schools have commented on the "huge transformation" in pupils once their confidence has grown, and that this provides social development opportunities for both groups of pupils and improves community cohesion. "Once contact was made the barriers came down."
- Parents and Carers are appreciative of what the school does and are also realistic about the sometimes distressing situations that their children find themselves in. "The school is open about things, even restraint." "My child has been transformed." "I felt guilty when talking to other schools, but at Mulberry Bush they set it up so my child is included not excluded." Parents comment on how calm the school and their children are, relative to previous experiences. One parent stated "The staff are fantastic – measured, patient, and consistent."

Areas for development

- New curriculum initiatives need to be carefully linked to the whole school curriculum plan to ensure clarity of objectives.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop promoting equalities in Mulberry Bush School.

As I explained previously, 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

David McMahon
Additional Inspector