

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



13 May 2008

Mr B Schram
Headteacher
Southwood School
Bryony Place
Conniburrow Boulevard
Milton Keynes
MK14 7AR

Dear Mr Schram

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) - three year longitudinal survey.

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my recent visit on the 30 April 2008 to look at work in your school to promote ESD.

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 will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term. This is a follow up monitoring visit which is intended to assess the progress the school has made in developing ESD throughout the school since the previous visit.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with a school visitor, staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, observation of one support lesson and a whole school 'Big Write' session as well as observation of the school environment.

Over the last year, the school has made good progress in embedding sustainability into the life of the school. The overall effectiveness is now judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in ESD are good overall. Pupils' personal development is also good.

- There is improved awareness among pupils of the need to lead a more sustainable lifestyle and an understanding that they have responsibilities too.
- They show a commitment to ethical purchasing, understand the principles of Fair Trade and how this can impact on improving people's lives many miles away.
- Many pupils understand the need to change behaviour and some are even encouraging their parents to think and live more ethically and environmentally.
- They are aware of the need to recycle, reduce and re-use. Pupils respond positively to the need to save power by switching off lights and electrical equipment and at times have to remind their teachers to do so. They are also aware of the need to use less; paper resources especially are being used more efficiently. Pupils are often leading by example.
- Pupils enjoy opportunities to become more involved in the local community and to make a difference. For example, they spoke with enthusiasm about their commitment to raise funds for the local retirement village and they enjoyed the opportunity to make suggestions how to improve local amenities as well as the school grounds.
- The amalgamation of the School and Eco-Council has been effective in reducing duplication and has raised the status of the environmental work pupils are involved in. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to participate and voice their views and they provide increased evidence to show that they are more actively involved in the decision making process than previously. They feel they are beginning to make a difference.
- Behaviour around the school is good. The pupils talk respectfully to adults and with each other. Girls show greater confidence and maturity and are able to articulate their views better than the boys.

Quality of teaching and learning of ESD

Insufficient ESD related lessons were observed to make a firm judgement on the quality of teaching and learning in ESD. However, pupils indicated that they particularly enjoyed the themed weeks when they were involved more in investigative and collaborative work on topics which engaged their interest. They appreciated the relevance of this work to their lives.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum has improved and there are elements which are now good.

- The school is making good use of the 'eight doorways' to engage most teachers in thinking about and in planning their teaching programme to ensure that sustainable messages are reinforced through a variety of subjects. However, there still remain some variations between classes.

- The pupils appreciate the focused themed weeks each term which raise their awareness of global issues and provide a valuable platform for engaging with the sustainability agenda.
- There are promising links being established with a partner school in Zambia and a contrasting school in the locality. This has good potential to engage pupils in developing their understanding of global issues as well as supporting community cohesion.
- The school has effective links with a variety of outside agencies. The partnership with a local firm has been especially fruitful and has resulted in a transformation of the school grounds.
- The pupils are proud of the way in which they were involved in the planning of the school ground project. They appreciate the new opportunities available to engage in maintenance work and gardening. Their creative and artistic skills have been put to good use to add art and ceramic work in order to personalise the school grounds and make them both colourful and unique.

Leadership and management of ESD

Leadership of ESD is good overall. Management is satisfactory

- There remains a clear commitment from senior managers to develop the school as a 'sustainable school'. The delegation and sharing of responsibility has brought most staff on board and has accelerated progress.
- Staff awareness and engagement has been further enhanced by involvement in whole school development and training.
- There is now a greater understanding of what living a sustainable lifestyle means to the school and a greater commitment and involvement from the majority of the staff to ensure that sustainability is embedded into the life of the school.
- The load is being shared more equitably with more staff taking greater responsibility for leading on various aspects such as school linking or the 'ROLF' project. The impact, as yet, remains embryonic in some cases.
- The identification of sustainability within the school development plan has raised the profile and ensured its importance throughout the school. Strategies to move the school forward are clearly identified.
- The care ethos is central to what the school does and the new mission statement, 'at Southwood we care for ourselves, care for others and care for the environment', exemplifies the desire of the school to be seen as a sustainable school. This links well with the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.
- The partnership with a local firm to transform the school landscape has motivated both staff and pupils alike. The outcome was quick, aesthetically visible and has created a 'can-do' culture. This has been a real catalyst for change. The momentum has captured the imaginations

of the school community and encouraged them to become more involved in caring for, using and improving their outdoor environment. The school grounds are now seen to be a real asset, both to the school and the wider community.

- The building remains unsuited to conservation of energy resources. However, the recent replacement of old windows has improved heat retention and lighting and has made the building more efficient than previously.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good overall.

- The pupils feel they are actively involved in the life of the school. The school enthusiastically encourages inclusive practice.
- The Learning and Achievement base and initiatives such as the 'ROLF' project are used effectively to build up the self esteem of pupils, especially those with learning needs. This allows them to become involved in, and participate more fully in, the life of the school.
- Newcomers to the school feel safe, comfortable and well supported especially if they having additional language or learning needs.
- Pupils feel the school is a safe environment in which to learn and appreciate the efforts the teachers are making to improve their learning environment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the initiatives which are currently being undertaken are consolidated in order to embed sustainability fully into the life of the school. It is especially important that the curriculum is fully utilised to reinforce learning about the need to lead sustainable lifestyles;
- developing the global dimension by making better use of the links being initiated with partner schools abroad and in the contrasting locality in order to enrich the curriculum and engage pupils more fully in thinking about their responsibilities as world citizens.
- encouraging pupils to take greater ownership of certain aspects of school life relating to sustainability, for example, encouraging them to produce and review the school travel plan as part of their learning in geography provides just one opportunity to make learning relevant to their lives;
- continuing to empower the 'School Council' to become a real change agent in the school
- auditing what has been achieved, reflecting on and celebrating success and identifying opportunities for further development.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ESD in 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

Leszek Iwaskow
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools
Specialist Adviser for Geography and ESD