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Miss P Williams
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Williams

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 Tuesday 30 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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' 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 outstanding.

Achievement and standards, including personal development

- The majority of pupils enter the school with average attainment. They then make outstanding progress and attain excellent results which are well above the national average at both Key Stage 3 and at GCSE. Provisional results for 2007 indicate that standards have risen again at both key stages.
- Pupils are polite and well mannered. They clearly enjoy school: their behaviour observed on my visit was excellent and they are well-motivated.

- Pupils talk enthusiastically about the impact LOTC has upon their learning and personal development. They particularly enjoy the Enterprise Days and can say how LOTC activities have helped improve their self-confidence, as well as their ability to work on their own and in groups. They also noted how LOTC activities had broadened their horizons in relation to career opportunities.
- LOTC activities are formally evaluated by staff who lead them. Through pupil questionnaires and staff evaluations, you can point to the way in which LOTC has enhanced the personal development of pupils and identify the contribution LOTC makes to learning. The monitoring and evaluation of the impact of LOTC upon achievement and standards is well developed in some faculties but this good practice is not universal.

Quality of teaching and learning within LOTC

- In the lessons visited, pupils displayed excellent attitudes to learning. Teaching was engaging and pupils were responding well.
- The planning, preparation and follow up activities for LOTC are thorough, as seen in lessons linked to GCSE coursework in geography and business studies. In personal and social education, for example, the contribution of visiting speakers is well integrated into schemes of work and the presentation by the former soldier to pupils in Year 9 helped them to appreciate more fully the text they were studying in English. In modern foreign languages, pupil feedback questionnaires on LOTC activities help staff to develop future plans.
- Displays around the school and in the meeting room reveal the wide range of LOTC activities. The poster you produced encapsulates the importance of LOTC to learning. Pupils think LOTC helps their understanding and they enjoyed the 'practical' and 'refreshing' nature of many of the activities. They also spoke of how these activities helped them become independent learners, improved their motivation and raised their expectations. As one pupil put it, 'I've learned in this school that there are no limits to my ambitions'.

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 pupils are involved in a range of LOTC activities in 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, be they inside or outside the classroom. This helps to explain the outstanding progress made by the pupils.
- The curriculum is carefully designed and developed to meet the needs and interests of the pupils. The range of opportunities is extensive and the pupils appreciate this. The ASDAN course is making an effective contribution to raising achievement at Key Stage 4. You carefully monitor the quality of off-site provision.

- LOTC activities are meticulously planned and thoroughly evaluated with any lessons learned and further improvements needed being quickly implemented.
- There is an extensive and successful range of clubs and opportunities for pupils outside school hours. The pupils greatly value these activities and especially the more recent additions, notably cheer-leading and pilates.

Leadership and management of LOTC

- You are passionate about improving learning and raising achievement. This enthusiasm and commitment is shared by your senior leadership colleagues and by your middle leaders who display a belief and commitment to LOTC.
- You and your colleagues are aware of the possible barriers to participation but you work effectively to deal with these, ensuring, for example, that costs do not prohibit involvement.
- The administration of LOTC visits is comprehensively managed by the educational visits co-ordinator. Planning is thorough and procedures for health and safety and for risk assessment are followed assiduously. Parents are well informed and you adhere closely to the local authority's policy and guidelines.

Inclusion

- You lead an extremely inclusive school in which the needs of all pupils are a priority for you and your staff. On a daily basis you and your staff live the school motto of 'Excellence for all'.
- Pupils are encouraged to participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities which are on offer and their involvement is carefully monitored.
- The pupil voice is strong, with pupils from both key stages feeling that they are consulted and listened to.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to develop and refine the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of LOTC on pupils' achievement and personal development in all faculties.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Maddison". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Michael Maddison
Her Majesty's Inspector