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Mrs Susan Baker
Headteacher
Magdalen Gates First School
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Dear Mrs Baker

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 21 June 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, a governor and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and displays as well as 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

- Pupils come to the school from a range of backgrounds and with different needs. Overall, attainment on entry is below average. Standards at Year 2 and Year 3 are also below average but are gradually rising over time, though in 2006 those in reading and writing dipped a little at age seven.
- Pupils can explain clearly how LOTC, including trips out, enable them to get on well together, work in teams, make choices and take turns, for example. There is clear evidence that LOTC contributes well to their personal development.

Quality of teaching and learning within LOTC

- LOTC activities, especially trips out, are carefully integrated within subject schemes of work and are well prepared for and followed up in lessons. Year 3 pupils spoke knowledgeably about evacuation in advance of a day trip which will involve them dressing up as refugees. A visit by the Reception children to Wroxham Barns stimulated some lovely writing when back in class with the children keen to talk about the trip and learning much from it.

Quality of the contribution made by LOTC to the curriculum

- The curriculum is appropriately planned to ensure continuity and progression. As the school now moves to becoming a full primary school, you and the staff are prudently taking the opportunity to revise the whole school curriculum, not just 'adding on' the additional year groups. Much creative thinking is going into planning for the new Year 4 class, with LOTC being included well. There are exciting plans for future residential visits and trips out of school.
- The school's walking distance from the city centre allows easy access to a number of local resources, including museums, which are used well to enhance learning. There is scope to use Norwich even more, in geography field work, for example.
- The imaginatively developed and secure school grounds are also well used for several LOTC activities and could be helpfully utilised further still.
- The outdoor area for Reception is not adequately resourced, or used often enough, to give the youngest children all the learning opportunities they deserve. However, this is mitigated somewhat by the ready availability of a large shared indoor area.
- There is a good range of very popular extra-curricular activities. I heard the ocarina group play together beautifully. The gardening club is a wonderful opportunity for Year 3 pupils to take significant responsibility, enjoy themselves and learn together. It was lovely to see them rightly so proud of the vegetables they had grown. There is no complete record or evaluation of how many pupils join in these activities, or whether they are equally attended by pupils of different groups. However, some of this information is known informally and has led to good additions or changes to what is offered.

Leadership and management of LOTC

- You place a very high value on LOTC and how it can contribute to learning. You also have a clear rationale of the importance of this for the school's community. This leads directly to the range of worthwhile activities which take place.
- There is a clear and well constructed policy for educational visits which is very useful and supportive to staff when planning and preparing visits out. Staff are supported further by the considerable work done by

administrative staff in making arrangements for LOTC activities. Governors play an appropriate role.

- You have attractive portfolios of photographs of a wide range of activities. These provide firm evidence of the considerable breadth of LOTC across the curriculum but do not evaluate the quality or impact of these activities on learning and personal development. Some informal appraisals are made but, overall, the lack of evaluation of LOTC makes the planning of further improvements more difficult. However, staff have just begun to make helpful educational evaluations of school visits.

Inclusion

- There is a clear commitment to inclusion of all pupils, shown through specific reference in working policies. All pupils go on visits and join in with LOTC.
- The school has a 'no charge' policy for all visits out, which are funded through the school budget and fundraising by parents. This removes any barriers of cost to families as well as reducing bureaucracy.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing the outdoor area for Reception pupils
- sharpening the evaluation of the impact on learning and personal development of LOTC, particularly by listening to pupils' views
- widening, as appropriate to the curriculum, the range of LOTC activities undertaken in the school grounds and the local area.

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

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector