

**National winner of the 2009 Learning Outside the Classroom Award for Excellence and Innovation, sponsored by TUI Student Division**

*Joan Nix, Curriculum Area manager of Sandhill View Secondary School in Sunderland, explains what the award means to them.*

We are delighted to be the winner of the national 2009 Learning Outside the Classroom Award. Giving children the chance to get out and about to experience things first-hand is our guiding principle and to be recognised in this way is a real credit to the staff, the students and the local community.

We never made a conscious decision to make learning outside the classroom our guiding ethos – it has just always been the way we have gone about things. I have been at the school for eight years now and since I started students have always gone outside the classroom. Over the years this has grown and every student



learns outside the classroom on a regular basis. We have been helped along the way by gaining performing arts status as well as having both a science and an arts facilitator.

As a school we are at the heart of our community, with a health centre, youth centre and public library all on the school site. With the community literally on our doorstep, we have been able to knock on doors find ways to work with locals to get pupils outside the classroom. This is especially true with the sports leadership programme we have been involved in where our students help local primary pupils develop on the playing fields.

We take a 'best-fit' approach to getting students out and about rather than a 'tailor-made' one. By making sure that each class includes chances to get away from their desks, each child gets the opportunity to learn outside the classroom on a regular basis. Now that our ethos is firmly established, teachers feel they have a freedom to be creative and many of our initiatives come from them. Not only do the activities interest the pupils but they also enthuse the teachers. Our local authority has been very supportive as they realise these experiences are good for our students.

Some experiences offer the whole school and community the chance to join together and be part of something special. Earlier this year when Year 11 was on work experience we collapsed the timetable for a week so that the rest of the school could stage the “Carnival de Sandhill View”. The whole event was a really good balance



between in-class and out-of-class experiences.

It was a fantastic chance for young people to learn creatively and took in elements of citizenship, art and culture. At the end of the week we invited parents and governors to join in the carnival.

At Sandhill View we pride ourselves on offering interesting learning experiences to all our students. The positive impact this has on the pupils is evident in all we do and all we achieve. We have made sure that year-round opportunities for students to get out and about are part of every school day. The benefit of our approach to learning that seems to resonate

most is that it helps emotionally and socially as well as academically – learning outside the classroom really offers the whole package.