

First National Learning Outside the Classroom Conference

As part of this 'Conference Special' edition of the newsletter, Manifesto Champions Peter Carne and Mike Tones give an overview of the first National Learning Outside the Classroom Conference, which took place in Greenwich this October.

Thursday 2nd October saw the first ever National Learning Outside the Classroom Conference take place at the Painted Hall in the Old Naval College, Greenwich. We could not have asked for a more fitting and inspirational venue and our thanks go to everyone at The Greenwich Foundation for being so accommodating.

Over 200 delegates attended the conference which was held to bring together people interested in learning outside the classroom. The day marked the launch of the 'Out & About' package of support for schools and a new Quality Badge for providers, as well as the launch of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom. The day also saw the first National Learning Outside the Classroom Awards, publication of Ofsted's report into learning outside the classroom and the launch of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's *Learning Away* initiative.

Information about all of the above is available on a new website learning outside the classroom website www.lotc.org.uk

Many of the conference attendees were representatives of Local Authorities; so we were very pleased that Dr. Maggie Atkinson, President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, was able to chair the event and that Kevin Brennan, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families, delivered the keynote address which set the stall out for the superb presentations that followed. Kevin's speech was an excellent summary of how learning outside the classroom sits in the context of wider educational initiatives like Every Child Matters and the Children's Plan.

Although we have now launched the Learning Outside the Classroom Council, which when fully in place (by the end of March 2009) will take over leadership and act on behalf of the wider Manifesto partnership, it is important that the DCSF continues to show its support; Kevin Brennan's presence at the Conference shows that continued backing. As co-opted members of the interim Board, we will also go on working to support and promote the Council in the run up to April 2009.

Thursday 2nd October also saw the launch of the Ofsted report into learning outside the classroom and we were delighted that Robin Hammerton was able to attend the conference and speak about the report. Everyone of us is passionate about what we are trying to achieve, which is why it is so important for us to have this authoritative and evidence based support. There can be few more powerful statements than Ofsted's first key finding in this report:

"When planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social and emotional development."

The conference also saw the presentation of the first National Learning Outside the Classroom Award for Innovation and Excellence. Castlechurch Primary School in Stafford took the top prize and we were very pleased that Headteacher Gill Hampton was able to

accept Castlechurch's award in person from the Minister. The competition for this award was fierce with nine regional winners selected across England; our congratulations go out to the entrants who all demonstrated excellent practice in making learning outside the classroom an essential part of learning and personal development.

We were also lucky to be joined by the talented pupils from Thomas Tallis School in London who participated in learning outside the classroom on the day; interviewing delegates about the importance of learning outside the classroom and closing the conference with a film of their findings.

A key aim of the Conference was to further raise the profile of the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto. We certainly feel that it has helped, but the most important thing is that schools, and the people and organisations that work with them, now have the tools they need to deliver top quality learning outside the classroom for their pupils.

We would like to take this opportunity once again to say big thank you to everyone who helped make the day the huge success it was.