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Mr J Grover  
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Dear Mr Grover

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science and creative learning

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 4 June 2008 to look at work in science and creative learning.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of science, the visit had a particular focus on transition within and between phases, the range of learning experiences and the status and use of SC1. We were also looking at how creative learning is identified and developed and how its impact on standards and achievement and on personal development is evaluated. This element of the visit was focused on the school's Quest curriculum strand; that is, the time set aside for cross-curricular project work.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be satisfactory. The overall effectiveness of the school's promotion of creative learning was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in science is satisfactory and standards are below average.

- Over the last three years standards in science have declined steadily and in the 2007 Key Stage 2 national tests results were below average.

Even so, this represents satisfactory progress from pupils' declining starting points on entry to the school in Year 4. The school is predicting that standards will improve in 2008 due to the strong emphasis being placed on developing pupils' experimental and investigative skills.

- Pupils enjoy this practical approach to teaching science and they are learning to collaborate with others. As a result pupils work well in groups and, where given the opportunity, are keen to be involved actively in their learning.
- Pupils were well behaved in all the lessons seen and well aware of the need for safe working practices.
- The use of easily available individual computers by Year 5 pupils adds to their skills in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) through science.
- All pupils make satisfactory progress from their different starting points.

### Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning in science are satisfactory.

- There is a good emphasis on teaching through practical activities although the learning intentions that underpin practical work are not always clear.
- Pupils are keen to carry out practical work but some teachers still over-direct the lessons and do not allow the pupils enough opportunities to be more actively involved in their learning.
- In line with the strong focus on assessment throughout the school, science assessment encompasses investigative skills as well as knowledge and understanding. Scientific skills are assessed regularly through investigations targeted at particular skill areas although there is not a clear overview of progression in development of these skills. Current plans to involve pupils in assessing their own and others' work will add extra impact to assessment practices.
- Pupils meet the expectations of good behaviour and there are very good relationships between all staff and pupils.

### Quality of the curriculum

The science curriculum is satisfactory.

- The science curriculum is organised using QCA schemes of work adapted to the needs of the school. Planning is thorough and covers all aspects of the National Curriculum, although opportunities are sometimes missed for turning ordinary practical activities into real investigations that could excite and engage the pupils.
- There is scope within the curriculum to extend a creative approach to teaching science. Curriculum planning would be enhanced through an audit of science skills and interests of both staff and pupils.
- There are good links with the high school that ensure progression across the transfer through a common Key Stage 3 curriculum.

- Science weeks are organised every two years and these raise the profile of science through a good mix of external presenters and in-school activities such as making rockets.
- The school organises an extensive programme of extra curricular activities and the pupils are enthusiastic participants.

### Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The science coordinator has a clear view of the subject strengths and areas for development, maintaining an overview across the school through a variety of monitoring strategies.
- Monitoring could be usefully extended to gauge impact of the curriculum more closely.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extending monitoring by the science coordinator to include evaluating the impact of the science curriculum on learning
- carrying out an audit of science skills and interests amongst both staff and pupils
- making sure there is a clear learning objective associated with every science activity.

### Creative learning

The development and impact of creative learning is good.

- As part of a broad strategy to raise standards, the school has recently set aside time and resources to improve pupils' motivation and develop a more creative and independent style of learning through well resourced cross-curricular project work. The impact on pupils' personal development and sense of achievement is already good. Children from Years 4 to 7 speak with enthusiasm and conviction about the challenge and rewards of being able to make choices about how to tackle a theme. "It's more than just learning from books." "The way the teacher helped us – she tried to make my mind think." It is, however, too soon to see how successful this approach is being in raising academic standards.
- The 'Quest' strand of learning has a productive emphasis on pupil choice – who to work with, how to interpret the project title, what methods to use – within a carefully structured framework that leads pupils through a process of planning, target-setting and guided self-evaluation.
- Easy access to ICT is the key to pupils' sense of independence and their scope for enquiry. Pupils across the ability range respond well to this. Children in Year 5, for example, had interpreted the 'mountains, rivers, coasts' brief in many different ways and were enthusiastically investigating ecosystems ranging from the Nile and the Himalayas to the coast of West Sussex. In some groups, one or two pupils took a

very strong lead, which inhibited their partners' scope for independent and creative learning.

- The school has not yet developed a systematic way of assessing the process of creative learning rather than the end product, and feedback during Quest sessions does not consistently balance encouragement with specific guidance on how to improve. This is recognised and is being addressed.
- The Quest strand in the curriculum is still being developed. It is well grounded in National Curriculum content and skills and benefits from its flexibility of approach, its connections across subjects and the way in which time and resources are organised.
- Development of creative learning throughout the school is a management priority understood and supported at all levels. The creative learning co-ordinator has very effectively established a process of collaborative planning, review and revision and is developing a strong team of committed and competent practitioners across the year groups. Formal and informal feedback from staff and pupils is used well to determine priorities for further review and development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing a consistent system for assessing progress in creative learning which can be used to improve teaching and learning across the curriculum.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop science and creativity 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Christine Jones  
Her Majesty's Inspector