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Mr D Brown
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Brown

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Creative Learning

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15-16 September to look at creative learning.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit had a particular focus on the ways in which you develop creative learning and the impact this is having on achievement and standards and on students' 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 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons and a Year 7 assembly.

The overall effectiveness of creative learning was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Creative modes of learning have helped raise the achievement at Ashmole School and encouraged students to become more investigative and take increased responsibility for their own learning.

The school is involved in a wide variety of projects with different organisations, such as the Royal Academy, the Medical Research Council, and Imperial College. These have helped to motivate students and bring expertise into the school so that the relevance and application of what is learnt in lessons can be fully appreciated.

The development of cross curricular links, such as the work in Year 9 on genetic engineering, cloning and IVF, the ethics of which were considered in humanities lessons and the theory and application by the science department, has engendered a wider appreciation of the complex issues involved in many scientific and technological advances.

Students are encouraged to feed back their experiences in lessons, form and year assemblies, and evening events. This has helped develop self confidence and communication skills which were clearly evident in the lessons observed, interviews with students and at an assembly where Year 8 students presented poetry they had written to the whole of Year 7 and their teachers.

Standards of behaviour in lessons and throughout the school are good. There is a willingness to learn and participate in activities. Students take pride in their achievements which are fully celebrated by the school. They have high aspirations and the majority are motivated to achieve their full potential. This is confirmed by consistent improvement in examination results at all key stages over the last five years.

Quality of teaching and learning

All the lessons observed were well structured and challenging. Widespread and effective use of interactive whiteboards enabled a range of resources to be used, which in turn supported more innovative teaching styles to be employed.

Good use of questioning helped develop ideas and encouraged students to make links to other subject areas. Students worked independently and collaboratively and were encouraged to present their observations or conclusions for peer review.

All the students interviewed commented appreciatively on the quality of teaching. They reported that lessons were enjoyable, interesting and taught in a creative way. They were encouraged to make choices, hypothesise and to learn from their mistakes. They felt supported and commented favourably on the very extensive range of extra curricular activities.

There is a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development led by the senior leadership team but involving all staff in the sharing of good practice. Innovative use of a film studio has encouraged staff to demonstrate new approaches to teaching that are recorded and disseminated to other teachers.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is well developed to promote creative learning. There are many good examples of productive collaboration between departments and there are numerous special themed events where the normal timetable is suspended in order that a particular topic can be explored in greater depth.

The school presents many opportunities for speakers and organisations to contribute to lessons or cross-curricular projects and to extend students cultural and social experience.

Through its specialist status it contributes to a number of inter-school collaborations and is presently developing a diploma line with five neighbouring schools and a sixth form college.

Leadership and management of creative learning

The senior leadership team has encouraged the heads of faculty and subject leaders to be innovative and experimental in developing the broader curriculum offer. Through good leadership, and well structured professional development, members of staff have been encouraged to try different teaching styles and approaches to the curriculum. This has contributed to the exciting and creative teaching that students commented upon so enthusiastically. There is a shared vision engendered by the senior team that gives a consistent commitment to the development of each student's potential, independence, confidence and sense of self worth.

Equality and diversity

The school develops equality and diversity very well. Effective strategies ensure above average attainment in all key stages, and no minority group consistently performs below expectation. The ethos of the school is very inclusive and the diverse ethnic mix has enriched the broader curriculum. The school works hard to forge strong links with all its parents and their active involvement has ensured good integration of the diverse school population.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the need to develop a more systematic way of assessing the process of creative learning
- the development of a system to monitor the effectiveness and outcomes of the cross curricular and themed events.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop creative learning in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Derek Wiles
Additional Inspector