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Mr T Phillips
Acting Headteacher
Wilbraham Primary School
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Dear Mr Phillips

Ofsted survey inspection programme: Creative Learning

Thank you for hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 23 September 2008 to look at creative learning.

As outlined in the pre visit 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 pupils' 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of your school's development of creative learning was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards and personal development

There is convincing evidence of high quality work across the key stages, which contributes to the excellent progress that pupils make at Wilbraham. Invariably they have a confidence and 'can do' attitude that enables them to take on challenges with relish. Role play, curriculum enrichment activities and the use of a well-planned, cross-curricular approach all contribute to the most effective learning opportunities. As a result achievement in writing, especially amongst the boys, continues to improve. Although more work is needed, the gap is narrowing between good quality writing found in pupils' workbooks and

that produced under test conditions. There have been similar successes in mathematics and science where the emphasis on a practical, thematic approach to learning has grabbed pupils' interests and supported the development of questioning skills and shared problem-solving. In mathematics, for example, the emphasis on using and applying has meant that pupils are adept at working out independently the problems set for them in class.

Pupils report that they are happy to come to school and enjoy lessons because 'the work is interesting and teachers 'make learning fun'. Attendance levels have increased significantly over recent years whilst the number of 'voluntary exclusions', where pupils leave the classroom without permission, has dropped to zero.

The impact of the creative development used by the school is impressive. There is a tremendous confidence and assuredness in pupils throughout the school. Even the youngest children are beginning to take responsibility and are keen to share what they know with others.

Quality of teaching and learning

There is evidence of good practice across the curriculum. Teachers ensure that pupils are set challenging tasks and make meaningful connections between subjects. The most effective teaching has a brisk pace, with challenging question and answer sessions and the use of role play to bring subjects and characters alive. The best teaching does not always accept the first answer but demands that pupils refine their thoughts and sharpen their responses. Pupils respond well to this level of challenge, encouraged to share their opinion and not worry about getting something wrong.

Assessment strategies are comprehensive although there is no formal record kept of pupils' progress in creative learning. Teachers offer good feedback orally but not all marking gives pupils a clear enough understanding of how to improve. On occasion pupils need the opportunity to reflect longer on what they have been asked before they are required to answer the question or the lesson moves on.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum strongly supports the development of creative learning. The influence of the Early Years curriculum can be found throughout the school with good results as pupils take charge of their own learning and decide how their work will be organised. They collaborate well with their classmates as, for example, they agree how the 'Manchester topic' in Year 4 should be tackled. Enrichment opportunities abound through termly, topic-linked visits. These bring the curriculum alive and are complemented by visitors such as artists and story tellers. Partnerships with local high schools, museums and universities are fully exploited to extend pupils' experiences.

Leadership and management

You have been well supported by your senior management team and governors in raising standards and improving pupils' personal development through developing creative learning. The leadership's role in providing a supportive and encouraging environment has been crucial. Staff training and professional development have made teachers skilled in modelling creative skills and clear about their role in promoting pupils' creativity. Despite budget constraints, funding for this aspect remains unaffected; it is money well spent.

Equality and diversity

Inclusion and diversity are at the heart of all that this multicultural school does. Learners feel they belong and establish a mutual respect for their school friends who come from such a wide range of backgrounds. For those pupils who find English difficult and struggle with the more traditional approaches to learning, the topic-based approach, allied to more practical activities, increases their confidence and helps to build their self esteem.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring pupils understand what they need to do to improve
- translating innovative approaches to writing through role play into improved standards when pupils take more formal tests.

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

As I explained in our 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

Mike Hewlett
Additional Inspector