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Mrs H Hickman
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hickman

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Creative Learning

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 25 September 2008 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 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 six lessons and your self-review of creativity.

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

Achievement and standards

Creative modes of learning have an outstanding impact on pupils' personal development and achievement. High levels of independent learning and ample opportunities for creativity were observed in lessons. As a result, pupils achieve very well and are impressively enthusiastic about school and learning. Pupils enter the school with below average skills but leave with above average attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Effective teaching of independence and creativity also means they have important personal attributes required to achieve well in the future.

Boys particularly enjoy the opportunities to be creative and this is contributing to improving their writing so reducing the gap with girls' attainment.

Quality of teaching and learning

The contribution of teaching and learning to the development of creativity is outstanding. This effectiveness stems from the school's approach to planning. Objectives are shared with pupils through a very consistent approach that enhances motivation because pupils can visualise the outcomes very easily. In Reception and Year 1 puppets are used brilliantly to achieve this. This clarity allows pupils and teachers to be creative about how outcomes are achieved.

Pupils' ideas are routinely sought and are often the springboard to further learning. In Reception this helps determine the topics to be covered. Sensitive teaching ensures pupils are at ease making mistakes and learning a lot from this. A creative approach is used to make the 15 minutes a day on letters and sounds very enjoyable, particularly for boys. In an outstanding Year 1 visual literacy lesson based on *Toy Story* a mid-session plenary was used to highlight a particularly interesting response. This encouraged others to be more creative and to work with even greater pace.

Self and peer assessment is exceedingly well developed with pupils able to offer sensitive feedback when they identify areas of improvement with their 'pink for think' highlighter pens. This promotes exceptional awareness of what pupils must do to be successful so pupils can work independently and creatively. Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently and involve pupils well.

Quality of the curriculum

The contribution of the curriculum to the development of creativity in learning is good. There has been a phased introduction of a more thematic approach to science and the foundation subjects. There is now time to be more creative and follow up pupils' ideas in a way not possible when all subjects were taught in regular but short lessons. Short, sharp sessions with pupils of similar ability on letters and sounds are resulting in more rapid development of reading. Very effective basic skill development is allowing more time for creativity which in turn raises achievement and increases enjoyment. A large range of visits and trips linked to the curriculum promote creativity. 'Hollywood Directors' is a particularly noteworthy after school activity as this involves pupils creating their own films.

Although pupils work creatively in science and foundation subjects there is a lack of recorded evidence of pupil involvement in investigations in these areas. This reduces pupils' ability to reflect on their experiences in these subjects as well as they can in mathematics and English.

Leadership and management

The impact of leadership and management in fostering creative learning is outstanding. Despite outstanding previous inspection outcomes there is not

the slightest sign that the school is developing any complacency. You ensure all staff constantly reflect on practice and there is a general recognition that creativity is central to the school's further improvement. This discussion is translated into action through very effective continuous professional development. An important aspect of this is your very frequent visits to lessons. Questions are posed in lessons to stimulate both teachers and pupils and encourage creative ways of learning. This also allows for significant informal monitoring of practice and complements the school's rigorous approach to performance management. Data are used well to target support and gain more over-arching insights into school effectiveness. The very high level of consistent good practice is clear evidence of the impact of the monitoring and evaluation of creativity.

Exceptional arrangements are made to involve parents. Workshops involve the carers of every pupil in the school. In Reception, regular newsletters tell parents of the activity they might undertake with their children so they can creatively engage even more in their topics. In response to pupil views, the outside play facilities available to older pupils are to be enhanced. This will further aid the development of creativity.

Equality and diversity

The school targets any under-achievement at an early stage and there is a record of effective interventions. The focus on the gender based writing attainment gap has been effective but the school is exploring even better approaches that will support girls also. Pupils with learning difficulties receive effective support so they can make good progress. In addressing a key issue from its last inspection, the school now successfully promotes multicultural education. Reference is made to many examples from different cultures and a strong link is developing with an even more multicultural inner-city church school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring investigative work is recorded in all subjects so pupils can reflect fully on their experiences in order to become even more creative and independent learners.

As 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

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector