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Miss J Hiller
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Hiller

Ofsted survey inspection programme: Creative Learning

Thank you for hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on Tuesday 30 September 2008 to look at creative learning.

As outlined in the 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 four lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Moorlands provides well for a small class of pupils with complex learning difficulties who, despite a low starting point, make rapid progress during their time at the school. Standards for the remaining Year 6 pupils consistently exceed the national picture in all core subjects and provisional results for 2008 indicate that this picture will be maintained. Staff provide all pupils with numerous opportunities to extend their learning in a practical, 'hands on'

manner. When this happens, the pace of their learning increases. Pupils are confident and self-assured as they are encouraged to take on additional responsibilities. They successfully apply their technical expertise when, for example, they use information and communication technology (ICT) to research a topic. Cross-curricular links made between some subjects enable pupils to apply their knowledge and understanding of mathematics and science in more practical ways. This is evident as they plan a piece of art work or decide where seeds should be planted in the school garden. The impact of this approach on pupils' personal development is very marked. Pupils of all ages have such positive attitudes that they welcome the opportunity to take on new challenges. High value is placed on the contribution they each make and this attitude is reinforced in the school's 'Awards Assembly' where personal achievement is celebrated by the whole community.

Quality of teaching and learning

Good teaching and learning are evident across the curriculum. In the most successful lessons, teachers ensure that pupils are set challenging tasks, work collaboratively and are encouraged to give constructive feedback on their classmates' work. When this happens their levels of independent thinking and their ability to make informed choices are greatly enhanced. 'I really enjoyed that lesson because it made those poems come to life' was one comment made by a pupil following an exciting opportunity to create and then perform their own poems. On some occasions, teachers' interventions are not precise or demanding enough to extend pupil's understanding and tasks set are over prescriptive. This results in missed learning opportunities.

Assessing pupils' progress in core subjects is very effective. There is a school wide determination to root out any potential underachievement and strategies for identifying pupils who might be missing targets are thorough. Useful feedback is also given following written work, with well judged comments guiding pupils on how they might improve their work in the future and setting them realistic targets. The school acknowledges that assessing progress in foundation subjects and in creative development is less well advanced and needs to be taken on further. Similarly, planning is generally undertaken in discrete subjects therefore missing opportunities to develop stronger links across the curriculum where appropriate.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum carefully ensures that National Curriculum content and skills are well covered. It is successfully enhanced by numerous opportunities for imaginative learning. A real feature of this curriculum design is the 'options' afternoon where pupils choose from an extensive menu of activities ranging from 'Experiencing Greece' to wall climbing. Each activity is carefully planned and monitored over a six-week period and delivered by teaching and support staff as well as visiting specialists. Pupils from all year groups, including those

from the small specialist class, come together to form an impressive learning community. The impact of this approach can be illustrated by the range of new skills acquired, the transferable skills that pupils' develop and the satisfaction they gain from determining their own learning path. Completing the six-week block also demands a self discipline when, for example, pupils learn a new instrument. Pupils' response is overwhelmingly positive describing options as 'really fun because you get to try out new things and we can use our new school gym'.

Leadership and management

Your clear and determined commitment to improving pupils' independence, self esteem and inventiveness are well supported by your leadership team colleagues and staff. In practical terms you have allocated a significant proportion of the school's timetable to activities that are designed to promote creative learning and key skills. As a result, pupils feel empowered and regard decision-making as a normal part of their school day. You have also been imaginative in your allocation of resources to promote learning in all its forms. Older pupils have responded enthusiastically to the supply of MP3 players containing the most recent spellings, tables and homework requirements. Similarly, the introduction of the learning platform, allowing pupils to access their files from home, reinforces the school's message that that ICT is a powerful tool for learning. There is a whole school commitment to professional development. Good use is made of visiting expertise, such as the music service, as well as valuable links with local high schools, providing staff with the necessary skills to deliver the more creative approaches to learning.

Equality and diversity

The school's commitment to equality and diversity is at the heart of all it does. The options approach allows all pupils successfully to access the creative curriculum regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. Yours is an inclusive and cohesive community where pupils are treated respectfully and their achievements celebrated.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving methods of assessment for foundation subjects and for the process of creative learning
- ensuring that opportunities to learn creatively in lessons are not missed.

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