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Mrs J Mitchell
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Mitchell

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Creative Learning

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 09 October 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 children's 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, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of progress records and observation of four activities.

The overall effectiveness of your nursery's development of creative learning was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Children arrive in nursery with a variety of pre nursery experiences but the majority have skills and levels of understanding which are very low when compared with expectations for three year olds. The majority are new to English and, for many, playing and sharing are new experiences. The nursery's emphasis on developing creative skills and providing a rich learning environment has paid dividends. In recent years, children's Foundation Stage Profile scores for the creative area of learning, measured as they leave nursery, have increased significantly. This has had a positive impact on their learning as it leaves them better equipped to experiment, use their

imagination and respond to the exciting range of experiences that are on offer. An outstanding feature of the nursery is the high quality learning environment. Everywhere a child looks there are interesting and stimulating activities on offer. These are carefully planned to meet their individual learning needs. The quality found in the classrooms is mirrored outside so that there is a continuity of learning wherever the children choose to play.

Role play provides children with very good opportunities to express themselves orally and to play collaboratively, especially when these skills do not come easily to them. Imaginative use of story times allows children to take on the characters of the story they are listening to. For example, 'Jack and the Beanstalk' came alive when a group of children agreed who should play each character. Even the less confident members, who were reluctant to speak publicly, were happy to take the part of Jack, his mother or the giant. They became increasingly confident as the story progressed.

The impact of creative learning on children's personal development is impressive. Their growing confidence to speak out and their ability to take on roles and to cooperate with their classmates are key features of the most successful activities. Acquisition of these skills enables children to join in and enjoy the full range of nursery experiences.

Quality of teaching and learning

High quality teaching and learning are evident throughout the nursery and this helps to explain why children make such good progress. Teachers and support staff provide children with activities that are carefully planned and retain their interest. There is good balance of child initiated and adult focussed sessions with all staff working flexibly, being prepared to support individual children as they pursue a particular interest. In the most successful activities, the adults facilitate children's learning by guiding and supporting them, asking searching questions that make them think and being prepared to wait as children consider their answer. For example, a small group of boys investigated a tray full of branches and leaves as they tried to spot the small animal figures that had hidden there. They used their imagination to create a scene where each animal they found had a particular role, such as the fox about to pounce on the chicken. The adult working with them intervened only to extend their language and, through skilful questioning, encouraged them to think of new ways of describing what might happen next. Occasionally, learning opportunities are missed, for example, when a student supervising snack time with a group does not sufficiently engage them in conversation.

The nursery keeps detailed records of children's progress in all the areas of learning and makes excellent use of them to plan future work. A particular emphasis is placed on how well children's creative skills are developing with observations made as they are engaged in a task. The nursery acknowledges that, in the light of changes to the early years' curriculum, observations need to be sharpened with a greater focus on identifying the next steps in learning.

Quality of the curriculum

The entire nursery curriculum is designed to encourage creative learning. Promoting independence and self-directed learning underpins the school's philosophy and the excellent curriculum provides opportunities to make it happen. There are no artificial boundaries to learning as pupils engage in an exciting and innovative range of activities aimed at improving their communication as well as their collaborative and independent learning skills. In addition to the well planned visits to places of interest such as a local farm, the nursery further enriches the curriculum by welcoming other professionals into the school. For example, a local potter worked with the children enabling them to create their own designs and to experience working with clay.

Leadership and management

Well supported by colleagues, you have created a strong culture within the nursery that recognises the importance of developing creative learning. Your self-evaluation of this aspect of school life is very accurate. Importantly, this whole school vision has been translated into some excellent practice. As a result, children's achievement and personal development are considerably enhanced. They are more confident, independent and happy to take on responsibility for their own learning - remarkable characteristics given their low starting point when they arrive. Your investment in staff training has paid off with all staff keen to improve and clear evidence that the learning from courses is translated into effective classroom practice on a daily basis. The work on rhythm and clapping are good examples of this with all groups able to 'tap along to' their favourite stories and nursery rhymes. In turn, this helps them to recognise the patterns they find in words when they start to read.

Equality and diversity

The multicultural nature of the nursery means that equality and diversity are at the heart of all that it does. Bradley is an inclusive nursery that contributes well to a strong sense of community cohesion both within the school and outside in the wider community. For those pupils who find English difficult and struggle with learning, the creative approach allied to more practical activities, increases their confidence and helps to build their self esteem.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving assessments and observations so that children's next steps in learning are clearer
- making sure learning opportunities are not missed.

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 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