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Mr A Fulbrook
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Fulbrook

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Creative Learning

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 09-10 October 2008 to look at creative learning.

As outlined in our 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 included interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of ten lessons and other activities.

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

Achievement and standards and personal development

Standards on entry are below average but students' progress well and, by Year 11, standards are in line with or just below expectation and many students make good progress. The school recognises that students learn well when their creativity is both encouraged and celebrated. There is much collaboration between subjects and help for students to understand ideas and experiences from everyday life. An outstanding lesson saw limited Year 7 students developing number skills through an auction. Group work, self-assessment and peer-assessment help students to become confident citizens

of the school and wider community, to form opinions, and to work productively with others.

Quality of teaching and learning in relation to the survey

Teaching in most lessons was good and, in some, outstanding. The best lessons provided opportunities for students to hypothesise, make value judgements and develop abilities to work independently and collaboratively. Creative activities with clear links to the learning objectives especially captured students' attention. This approach was seen too in a student-led assembly providing illustrations of lives saved as a result of students' charitable projects.

Since the section 5 inspection in June 2007, considerable attention has been given to developing assessment techniques, monitoring progress and identifying areas for improvement. Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is well structured and comprehensive. There is evidence that it focuses on assessment methods that both identify and develop creative styles of learning. Lesson planning, however, does not routinely identify how creative learning might improve students' involvement and enjoyment and promote better learning. Use of information and communication technology (ICT) is firmly embedded in classroom practice, but its use to promote students' creativity is an area for development.

Quality of the curriculum

Creative learning is well supported by a curriculum that is good overall, although the school's small size sometimes constrains flexibility. Particular strengths include an emphasis on assessment to promote learning, leading to enhanced use of creative activities. Cross-curricular links are strong in, for example, art, music and history, but time constraints are seen by some departments as a barrier. General studies teaching makes a highly effective contribution to developing students' thinking and critical skills as does the good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities.

The impact of music specialist status, recently granted, is already being felt despite limitations of accommodation. Similar constraints apply in expressive arts but a lesson in the constrained space of the green room was outstanding, despite the limitations of just a tiny television to illustrate a choreographer's work.

All students, regardless of academic ability or disability can participate in and enjoy numerous activities. Many are outside timetabled lessons, for example, the boxathon and salsa dance session. With a strong, specific link through the Church, every opportunity is taken for community involvement.

Overall, there is a remarkably vibrant feel to the curriculum, with a culture in which creativity is celebrated and valued, and which has an impact much greater than the sum of individual contributions.

Leadership and management

You provide a strong sense of direction, generating a shared vision how the school can best support the ideals and aspirations of its students in a caring environment, using creative learning as a powerful tool. The school's Christian ethos provides a strong focus for building upon the talents of every one of its students. Overall, leadership and management are good.

The school's self-evaluation is accurate. Committees to manage change involve teachers and other staff, the student voice, and governors, and the promotion of creative learning linked to assessment for learning is seen as a powerful tool. You and your team ensure that extensive extra-curricular programmes contribute firmly to the school's culture and character. These initiatives involve all teaching and support staff in projects to develop and support each student's personal skills and expertise.

Equality and diversity

A conviction that every child matters pervades the work of this school. It contributes significantly to the positive and harmonious environment for learning in which students' participation in the mainstream curriculum or in the many activities offered is not inhibited by physical disabilities or learning difficulties.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to raise awareness of the role of creativity in promoting enjoyment and involvement of students in lessons, leading to enhanced learning, confidence, and the promotion of life skills
- to make the evaluation of creative learning a greater part of the school's procedures for monitoring teaching and learning
- to enhance the use of ICT in promoting creative learning in lessons.

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

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

David Lewis
Additional Inspector