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Mr D Pratt  
Headteacher  
Little Common School  
Shepherds Close  
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East Sussex  
TN39 4SQ

Dear Mr Pratt

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Creative Learning

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 14 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 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 five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

The decision taken in 2006 to make 'learning journeys' the defining feature of your pupils' school experience has had a perceptible and positive impact on standards and achievement and on pupils' personal development. Standards on entry are broadly in line with national averages but the overall attainment of pupils by the end of Year 6 is better than the national average, supporting the school's confidence in the benefits of the 'learning journey' approach. The focus on key skills such as communication, problem-solving and teamwork ensures continuity across subjects and from one year to the next. Staff and pupils agree that the move away from knowledge-based assessment to the

assessment of developing skill levels has given greater clarity to the tracking of individuals' progression as learners. There is, nonetheless, a shared appreciation that you cannot be a creative and skilled learner without knowledge and understanding to work with. Classroom displays, competitions, tests and rewards complement curriculum coverage in lessons. They encourage pupils to be enterprising and accurate in their use of vocabulary and in their application of mathematical and scientific principles to topics as diverse as 'wheels' and 'hats'. The high standard of pupils' work on display and the confidence with which pupils explain what they know as well as what they can do indicate that this approach works well.

### Quality of teaching and learning

There is a school-wide commitment to learning based on enquiry and experience so that pupils become adept at selecting relevant material, adapting or developing it in collaboration with others, and presenting their conclusions to the class for evaluation. The mutual respect and liking with which staff and pupils treat each other take the fear out of making mistakes. If something does not turn out as expected, the reasons why are discussed and the experience is seen as valuable. Teachers have good questioning skills, encouraging pupils to think for themselves and to recognise that there may be more than one viable answer to a problem. Material from one subject is well used to stimulate thinking and understanding in another - for example, in a mathematics session Year 1 pupils were prompted to think about shape and pattern by looking at and discussing paintings by Bridget Riley.

Pupils throughout the school respond with very engaging enthusiasm and growing adeptness to these opportunities to develop and test ideas through practical investigation. They deal constructively with each other's questions and suggestions. The impact on their personal development is outstanding: from Year 3 pupils who identified the school's strengths as 'the kindness' and 'the teachers', to pupils from Years 4 and 5 who spoke fluently and with impressive maturity about their personal journey through the school, with specific examples to illustrate their progress. Pupils take pride in achievement and recognise the value of being able to apply what is learnt in one curriculum area to tackle a challenge in another.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is built round a sequence of learning journeys for each year group, with the scope and focus of each project mapped on a central grid. This enables the leadership team and subject leaders to check that the national curriculum is fully covered and that pupils have opportunities to grasp the essential features of each subject as well as to make connections between them. Each learning journey involves several subjects; for example, Year 5's 'Jungle Smoothies' draws on social and physical geography, science, technology of different kinds, mathematics and English. The intended outcome for each journey is clear at the start – perhaps a presentation to parents or an exhibition or a performance – which establishes specific parameters and priorities. Every journey begins with a 'Wow!' event, some as ambitious as a trip to York to explore Viking influences. Pupils explain that the

'Wow!' is to 'get you inspired and make you *want* to know more'. They are clear about the breadth of learning involved. 'In between the Wow and the outcome, you don't just have a block of one thing, you do different things to fit - like literacy, numeracy and Information Communication Technology.' At the end of every journey, pupils evaluate the experience in terms of the skills they have acquired or improved and the knowledge and understanding they have gained.

Along with others in the Bexhill Consortium, the school has established a lively relationship with the de la Warr Pavilion's education department. Recent collaboration, for example, has led to displays of 3-D work by pupils being exhibited in the Pavilion. Planning for each collaborative project is done jointly between teachers and the Pavilion's Head of Education, determining the outcome to be worked towards and how best to use the Pavilion's resources and the expertise of creative practitioners.

### Leadership and management

You and your staff are most effectively translating a commitment to fostering creative ways of learning into practical strategies with a positive impact on pupils' learning and personal development. The introduction of 'learning journeys' has been well supported by training for staff and by the continuing process of review and revision that you and your senior team have established. Careful planning and monitoring ensure that pupils' progress is well mapped and prompt action taken in response to any concerns. Partnerships with other Bexhill schools and with organisations like the de la Warr Pavilion add further scope for creative learning to your school's own outstanding provision.

### Equality and diversity

The school promotes equality and diversity very well. Its strong ethos fosters mutual respect and care for individuals. Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, feel engaged and rewarded.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- managing group work in ways that ensure that all pupils make a positive contribution and share equally in the learning.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop creativity in the school.

As we 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

Patricia Metham  
Her Majesty's Inspector