

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



16 October 2008

Mr J Flower
Headteacher
St Paul's Catholic College
Jane Murray Way
Burgess Hill
West Sussex
RH15 8GA

Dear Mr Flower

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Creative Learning

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 16-17 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 made included interviews with the senior leadership team, teachers and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of eight lessons and of many of the enrichment activities run on Wednesday afternoons. The overall effectiveness of your school's development of creative learning was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards and personal development

Your students enter with slightly higher than average prior attainment overall, although a broad spectrum of abilities and interests is represented. By the end of Year 9, students' results in national tests are significantly above the national average, reflecting excellent progress. The proportion gaining five or more A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, by the end of Year 11 has consistently and emphatically outstripped county and national averages, demonstrating that progress continues to be excellent. Results for A and AS level are generally above national averages. Students' success grows out of the school's ethos and the high expectations students share with staff

and with parents. A fine-mesh of pastoral care and academic guidance, informed by detailed and well used data, ensures that each student has challenging but realistic targets and is expertly supported to achieve them. There is a focus on developing a spirit of enquiry and enterprise, imagination, critical thinking, confidence and self-discipline – and it works. Students of all ages are cheerfully confident without being brash, unstintingly responsive and purposeful. They understand how they learn most efficiently and appreciate the care taken by teachers to include a variety of learning approaches in each lesson. They trust their teachers and each other and so have few qualms about volunteering an opinion or presenting an activity, which enlivens lessons and positively promotes creative rather than passive learning. In some subjects, such as BTEC media studies, effective ways have been developed to assess the process of learning as well as a result.

Quality of teaching and learning

Students identify good teaching as one of the school's key assets. 'Good teachers listen as well as expect you to listen.' 'They're enthusiastic and can relate topics to their personal experience.' 'They have good class control - you can joke but you get the work done.' 'They're always trying out new things.' Careful planning underpins well paced and engaging lessons. They have clearly presented objectives and create opportunities for students to work in a variety of ways, to make choices, to develop and test concepts through practical work and to reflect on what they have learnt and what they should do next. One benefit of the school's sports specialism has been training led by the Director of specialism in how to use feedback from teachers and well-directed self-assessment and peer review by students to enhance learning.

A sophisticated, versatile and serviceable 'virtual learning environment' (VLE) has been developed – and is still evolving – to provide students with the resources and the skills needed to become independent, collaborative and creative learners. The VLE presents information in ways to suit all learners and supports every area of the curriculum. It is a medium for discussion forums, for one-to-one question and answer exchanges between students and teachers and for the presentation and assessment of work. It is both a stimulus and a vehicle for students to push their own boundaries by creating resources for other students. Constantly updated data enable students to track their own progress and teachers and managers to identify promptly individuals or groups whose progress is slowing or stalling. Originally, development of the VLE focused on content, its capacity to store material in an accessible and organised way for reference. Recently there has been an important shift in its role; it is now seen as an active tool for learning. Students are clear that it helps them consolidate their knowledge and find ways to expand, shape and share their thinking.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum has a traditional, largely academic framework within which much innovative teaching and learning takes place. It is very well suited to the expectations and priorities of those who choose this heavily oversubscribed school. Each subject maintains a distinct identity, ensuring

that students develop a clear sense of the territory covered and the navigation guides used in each. While recognising connections between history and literature, for example, they understand key differences in content and approach. In Years 10 and 11, students may opt for some subjects with a significant practical element both in the syllabus and the final assessment. That possibility continues in the sixth form, with options such as BTEC media studies most successfully providing opportunities for creative learning within a rigorous framework. Alongside this largely traditional curriculum, the school runs an ambitious and highly valued enrichment programme, encouraging students to engage in activities as diverse as team and individual sports, drama, dance, cookery, chess and Latin. Recently, a cross-curricular programme has been introduced, with the normal timetable suspended for a week's co-ordinated exploration of a topic such as 'Space and Rocket'. As one student was keen to point out, 'There's something for everyone.'

Leadership and management

There is a clear and pervasive ethos rooted in the school's Catholic foundation, which is well understood and valued by staff, students and parents. In very practical ways, leadership and management at all levels create opportunities for students' individual talents and needs to be strongly supported. The school's approach to teaching and learning very effectively combines academic rigour, challenging targets and preparation for success in formal tests with the development of skills and attributes that will equip students well for life beyond school. The school benefits from its readiness to work in partnership with a wide range of agencies and to share knowledge and expertise with other schools.

Equality and diversity

St Paul's is a highly cohesive community, where trouble is taken to ensure that all students know they are valued and have a positive contribution to make and where equality of opportunity is real.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that group activities successfully engage all students so that all benefit equally from the learning opportunities presented.

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

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector