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Mrs S Binns  
Headteacher  
Stannington Infant School  
Stannington Road  
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Dear Mrs Binns

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 16 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 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards and personal development

Achievement and standards remain high with as yet unvalidated 2008 results for pupils in Year 2 indicating that this picture is being maintained. In recent years, progress in writing has been particularly good with the different groups represented in the school all doing well. A whole school focus on improving communication skills, using imaginative and creative approaches to learning, has paid dividends. Pupils spoken with were confident and articulate, ready to speak out and prepared to voice an opinion. There is convincing evidence that improvements in speaking and listening have also contributed to better performance in writing. Pupils have a much wider vocabulary and, through

their 'oral story writing' sessions, they are beginning to capture the imaginative stories they create, and then express themselves in the written word. The exciting learning environment provided in each classroom and the imaginative approach to the curriculum offer pupils numerous opportunities to learn creatively. Drama and role play are highly regarded features of classroom practice and they encourage pupils to become active characters in the stories they are creating. In addition, pupils are encouraged to provide 'peer feedback' as they listen to a story written by a classmate. For example, on this visit, pupils described where its strengths lay and then explained how it could be improved. Their ability to provide quite sophisticated feedback is a remarkable achievement in children so young.

Learning in a creative way has had a very positive impact on pupils' confidence and self esteem. There is a strong work ethic within the school and, whilst pupils enjoy their tasks, there is a keenness to 'get on with our work'. They have a 'can do' attitude towards the challenges set for them as well as an understanding that if they get it wrong it doesn't matter. 'That's how you learn', explained one boy as he struggled with an answer. Pupils are very proud of their achievements because the school is quick to celebrate their successes. This builds their confidence with even the youngest pupils keen to talk about their school and to take on responsibilities.

### Quality of teaching and learning

Teachers encourage pupils to become independent learners. Their questioning skills are particularly effective. Pupils are challenged to solve their own problems, come to their own conclusions and explain why they have reached a particular point of view. In many of the best lessons drama is used successfully to bring topics and themes alive. This approach is an important factor in the success of pupils' writing because it enables them to structure a story orally before anything is committed to paper. Although there is no formal record kept of pupils' progress in creative learning, assessment strategies are rigorous and effective. Teachers offer excellent feedback both orally and in writing, leaving pupils clear about what they need to do to improve.

### Quality of the curriculum

An exciting curriculum engages pupils' interests. It is organised in a way that allows them to build on their successes in the Foundation Stage. The curriculum is underpinned by an Early Years' approach to learning with an emphasis on developing skills and attitudes. These attributes can be transferred more readily to meet the challenges as pupils move through the education system. Staff reflect on the curriculum they design and, when appropriate, remove artificial barriers created by subjects and replace them with themed approaches.. Such is the school's success in developing pupils' positive attitudes and dispositions that it acknowledges that many could now become more involved in planning the direction of their own learning. There are numerous enrichment opportunities provided by the school. For example, all classes make at least one visit each term to places of interest and the

school welcomes a wide range of 'Arts Partners'. These visiting professionals regularly work alongside the pupils and their teachers.

### Leadership and management

You have been well supported by your senior leadership team in providing creative learning opportunities within your school. Through your drive and vision you have ensured that the 'creative ethos' is fundamental to all that happens. You have carefully monitored its development and recognised the positive impact it has had in driving up standards and enhancing your pupils' personal development. Staff training and professional development, particularly in areas such as oral story-telling, have equipped teachers with the tools to improve their own creative skills and those of their pupils.

### Equality and diversity

The school's use of creative, less formalised, approaches to learning encourages pupils of all abilities and backgrounds to take part confidently. As a result, equality and diversity are promoted very well. The school makes effective links with a wide range of partners, which helps to promote community cohesion. Many of the younger children have only just arrived at school but the opportunities that you offer them to learn creatively and practically have enabled them to settle quickly and grow in confidence.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- allowing pupils to take on even more responsibility for their own learning
- ensuring assessments make reference to pupils' progress in creative learning.

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

Michael Hewlett  
Additional Inspector