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15 October 2008

Mr J Devlin
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Devlin

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Creative Learning

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 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 staff, learners and visitors working in the school, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, observation of three lessons, a range of different activities in the afternoon lessons and a formal interview in the school radio station.

The overall effectiveness of creative learning was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

The school's challenging, creative curriculum is having a positive impact on pupils' achievement. Children make a very good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) because there is a strong emphasis on making choices and taking account of the classroom routines. Children thoroughly enjoy developing technical skills and are making very good progress in early reading and writing skills. For example, a child investigating the texture of leaves in the sand tray volunteered the letter 'c' after choosing the word 'crispy' to describe how it felt. Although academic standards overall are below

average at the end of Key Stage 1, this represents good achievement given standards on entry. The emphasis on providing meaningful experiences for pupils through visits and visitors into school is resulting in higher standards in writing and speaking and listening by Year 2. Pupils talk very confidently about their shared experiences and teachers provide well focused writing tasks to extend pupils' confidence into the technical skills of writing and communicating verbally. By the end of Year 6 standards are average, which also represents good progress over time. The progress in speaking and listening is outstanding. This is partly due to the school's radio station. Pupils have a much higher level of sophistication than expected for their age in asking open-ended questions to adults and other pupils. They have a very good understanding of the studio's technical aspect, such as the importance of carrying out tests for sound quality. The school is in the early stages of assessing creative learning across the curriculum. This assessment is recorded very effectively in the EYFS. The school is in a good position to extend it and involve pupils in identifying and recording their own progress as they move through the different classes.

The high emphasis on creative learning results in outstanding personal development. Pupils have high levels of confidence in taking the initiative and following decisions through. For example, the school council learnt that it was noisy in the hall at lunchtime. The pupils devised some new rules and explained them to others allocated by the school to check that the rules were being carried out. Pupils work very effectively in teams from an early age. Groups as young as seven years old allocate roles to each other and share their ideas in order to complete a task. These skills prepare pupils extremely well for their future lives. Pupils are extremely enthusiastic about their learning and are very proud of their school. Their behaviour is excellent. There are high levels of racial harmony and girls and boys work very comfortably with each other. They make excellent contributions to the school community. They thoroughly enjoy listening to the radio broadcasts each week and are delighted to plan the programmes and make their own contributions. They also have an excellent understanding of the local and regional, national and international communities, which they gain from the imaginative range of visits they make and the wide range of visitors.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good. It has some outstanding features. Teachers use interesting visits and visitors effectively as a stimulus to develop key learning skills as well as literacy and numeracy skills. There are high quality partnerships between teachers and support staff and this ensures that individuals receive very effective support in reflecting on their experiences. For example, pupils were delighted to share their perceptions of the animals they had seen on their visit to a local farm. Teachers organise groups effectively to provide opportunities for pupils to work together to produce a shared outcome. For example, groups of pupils produced a drama to show the key features of the Good Samaritan and were proud to present it to the rest of the class. Teachers use questioning well to extend pupils' thinking. In the best teaching the questions are very challenging, sustain a fast pace to extend pupils' learning and match individuals' different learning

needs very closely. In the best lessons teachers give pupils high levels of responsibility for carrying out the tasks and organising each other.

Quality of the curriculum

The school provides an outstanding curriculum to develop pupils' creative learning, which they thoroughly enjoy. The organisation of the Wonder Weeks is excellent. The principle of teachers and pupils deciding together on what the focus for the week will be, together with the organisation of meaningful visits and visitors, means that pupils have a fund of interesting experiences to extend their learning. The curriculum based around Radio OV is exemplary. The provision of the studio, the high quality expertise from the local radio station, the organisation for classes to have their own media and the weekly broadcast are all having a major impact on pupils' creative learning. The work within the Investors in Pupils is also supporting pupils' development very effectively, particularly opportunities such as the daily Pupil Advice Bureau. There are excellent examples of learning across different subjects, such as the focus on Henry the Eighth, where pupils were making Tudor roses in clay, drawing delicate portraits of Henry, writing in a Tudor style script and producing databases of his six wives.

Leadership and management of creative learning

Leadership and management of creative learning are excellent. The headteacher has an extremely clear vision of the importance of this aspect of provision and of involving the community in the school's work. His great enthusiasm is transmitted very effectively to the senior and middle managers, who share his vision and carry out their different roles efficiently. There is a strong emphasis on professional training that builds whole school expertise as well as supporting individuals. The school's work is monitored and evaluated very thoroughly to build on the successes in creative learning.

Equality and diversity

The school sets a very high priority on equality and makes sure that every pupil has access to the creative opportunities. Everyone goes on the school trips, whether this is to the local farm, to London or to Paris. The school values and celebrates the diversity amongst its pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extending assessment of creative learning through the school and involving pupils in identifying and recording their own progress as they move through the different classes
- organising pupils' work to allow pupils and staff to track the development of individuals' learning more efficiently.

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

Maggi Shepherd
Additional Inspector