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Mr R Mitchell
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mitchell

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 17-18 November 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 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 staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of lessons and a performance by students from the Greenfield centre, an assembly and a peer reading session.

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

Achievement and standards and personal development

Creative modes of learning are being used effectively to raise standards, engage students and encourage a more active role in personal learning.

Students arrive at the school with levels of attainment below that of the national and local averages. The school works hard and is successful in raising these standards as evidenced by overall positive value added scores. Attainment data is affected by the inclusion of students attending the specialist centre for severe and moderate learning difficulties.

Students are encouraged to feed back their experiences in lessons and assemblies. Individual and group project work is a feature of many curricular areas. Students report that making presentations, frequently using PowerPoint and other digital technology, is a common occurrence. This has helped develop self confidence and an appreciation of how technology can be used to enhance the quality of delivery. The school has developed a well structured peer mentoring and reading scheme. Sixth form students support teachers in local primary schools in the delivery of physical education and science lessons.

The standard of behaviour observed was good. There was a willingness to learn and participate in lessons. Progress is closely monitored, backed by a well structured target setting process, so that all students are aware of their current levels of attainment and how they can improve on them.

Quality of teaching and learning

All the lessons observed were well structured and challenging. Students responded positively. They were willing to volunteer information and to listen to the views of others. Widespread and effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) and digital technology enable staff to teach in an innovative way that encourages creative learning. Students work well together and are encouraged to present their observations and work for peer review. All the students interviewed commented appreciatively on the support they receive from staff and on challenging and exciting teaching. The range of opportunities available to students and the extensive provision of extra-curricular activities were also commended by those interviewed.

There is a comprehensive programme of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) led by the senior leadership team but involving all staff in the sharing of good practice.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is an outstanding feature of the school. It is broad, innovative and tailored to meet the needs of the individual learner. The school has embraced creative modes of learning and fully integrated them into its very broad curriculum. The Greenfield Centre approaches all its teaching and learning through termly cross-curricular themes, each one ending with a public performance or celebration of achievement. The school has developed extensive links with outside agencies and organisations. Regular involvement of speakers and invited guests as well as extensive local, national and international visits and exchanges enliven and contextualise the curriculum and help motivate students. There are numerous and well established cross-curricular links and themed events, such as the collaboration between art and science on the heart and circulatory system. In Year 10, three days are allocated for all students to work on a project with local companies to improve their economic understanding. These have engendered an appreciation of the links between subjects and encouraged students to apply their knowledge in a broader context.

Key Stage 4 starts in Year 9, allowing students longer to develop their knowledge and understanding and providing flexibility for departments to study topics in greater depth. There is a broad range of subjects offered to students at Key Stages 4 and post-16, including traditional academic as well as applied and vocational courses. The school is expanding its well equipped vocational centre and intends to increase its curricular provision.

The school is involved in numerous international links and charity work, such as its sponsorship of an orphanage in Malawi and its involvement in the Global Youth Leaders Conference (GYLC) in the USA. A direct result of this is that a former participant in the programme has been invited to the inauguration ceremony of President Obama in January.

Leadership and management

The senior leadership team has encouraged staff to be innovative and experimental in developing the broader curriculum. There is a clear vision for the future engendered by the senior team and a shared ethos which is understood and appreciated by staff and students. Staff are enthusiastic and dedicated to the school and its students. This commitment is widely appreciated by students.

Equality and diversity

The school's support structures and responsive curriculum encourage students of all abilities and backgrounds to participate confidently in their learning. This is an inclusive and caring community in which all students are supported and given many opportunities to succeed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing methods of assessing the process of creative learning
- ensuring that, as far as possible, sixth form students attending the vocational centre are integrated into the school and its broader provision.

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 local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Derek Wiles
Additional Inspector