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Mr I Worthington
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Worthington

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Creative Learning

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 07 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 and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of six lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Provisional 2008 results for pupils in Year 6 indicate that high levels of achievement of pupils in all the core subjects have been maintained. The exceptional quality of the learning environment, allied to the huge range of opportunities for creative learning, makes Castle View an exciting place to be. Achievement is celebrated and rewarded in all aspects of learning and this ensures that pupils of all abilities, as well as those new to English, are able to find success in their work. Invariably, pupils are confident in their abilities and take a tremendous pride in their work. Role play, curriculum enrichment activities and imaginative timetabling arrangements all contribute to some

outstanding learning opportunities. As a result, achievement in all the curriculum areas continues to improve, placing the school within the top five per cent of schools nationally in value added measures. Improvements in writing have been a particular success. The use of creative approaches such as drama, freeze frames and peer moderation to support and extend the writing has contributed to the rapid progress made. The quality of pupils' work in this area has also been translated into improved outcomes when measured more formally by external Year 6 tests.

The impact of creative learning on pupils' confidence and self-esteem is marked. They respond to new challenges with great gusto and enthusiasm, taking pride in their achievements and valuing the exciting opportunities that have been provided for them. There is a great confidence and assuredness in pupils throughout the school.

Quality of teaching and learning

High quality teaching and learning is evident across the curriculum. Teachers engage pupils with interesting and demanding work. Good use of themes in the planning helps to ensure that tasks are relevant and that meaningful connections are made between subjects. Half the lessons observed were good and the other half outstanding. Features of the very best teaching included the use of role play to bring characters in stories alive, regular recaps to ensure that pupils are clear about their work and incisive questioning that requires them to think even more deeply. Even with younger children the demands are great. They are expected to have views and opinions not only on their own work but also on that of others. In a Year 2 class pupils were asked to comment on the artwork of their partner, making two positive comments and then explaining how the work might be improved. Modelling themselves on their class teacher, they were constructive and tactful but left the recipient in no doubt about how they needed to improve. As pupils throughout the school observed, 'We have to think for ourselves here and then work together'. Pupils respond well to this approach, encouraged to share their opinion and not worrying about getting something wrong. They talk enthusiastically about topics they are working on and visits they have made. Assessment strategies are rigorous and effective although there is no formal record kept of pupils' progress in creative learning. Teachers offer excellent feedback orally but not all the marking gives pupils a clear enough understanding of how to improve.

Quality of the curriculum

The exciting and innovative curriculum strongly supports the development of creative learning. Cross-curricular themes make learning more logical by removing some of the artificial barriers created by subject specific teaching. The school acknowledges that the pupils themselves could become more involved in planning the direction of their own learning. There are many good examples of where the school has been imaginative in its curriculum design and timetabling arrangements. For example, foundation subjects are often 'blocked' into days or even weeks so that a topic or theme can be explored in sufficient depth. Similarly, the importance of drama in developing creative and

imaginative learners is illustrated by year groups experiencing a 'Drama day'. On one of these days a Year 3 group worked with a drama specialist to produce a performance of 'The Jolly Postman'. The intensive nature of the day, the pace of the learning and the need to work collaboratively, all contributed to a successful and enjoyable outcome for the pupils. Their sense of achievement as they performed in front of an invited audience was clear for all to see, as was their sense of relief at meeting the challenge. The use of outside expertise to support the creative learning is another successful feature of the school. Enrichment opportunities are numerous and partnerships with local high schools and museums are fully exploited to extend pupils' experiences.

Leadership and management of aspect

Well supported by your senior leadership team, you have recognised that the time and resources invested in developing creative learning is an effective way to raise standards and enhance your pupils' personal development. The major impact has been on pupils' self esteem and the high expectations that they readily accept. Staff training and professional development have enabled teachers to improve their own creative skills and, throughout the school, you have established a clear vision about how creative learning can be fostered.

Equality and diversity

The school promotes equality and diversity very well. All pupils have access to the exciting curriculum opportunities and enrichment activities that are on offer. Learners feel they belong and establish a mutual respect for their school friends who come from such a wide range of backgrounds. You have ensured that pupils newly arrived from Eastern European countries are fully involved in the life and work of the school despite some of them being new to learning English. 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 more responsibility for their own learning
- ensuring that the marking of work makes it clear to pupils how they can improve.

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

Mike Hewlett
Additional Inspector