

Office for  
Standards  
in Education



## **Expecting the unexpected**

**Developing creativity in primary and secondary schools**

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## Introduction

1. In 1999 the report *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* was published by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE). This committee was set up in 1998 by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to make recommendations on the creative and cultural development of young people. Two further developments were associated with this initiative: a Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) three-year curriculum project designed to advise schools on how to promote pupils' creativity; and a project funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport but managed by the Arts Council England entitled Creative Partnerships. This latter project aimed to enable children in selected areas to gain creative skills through partnerships between schools and cultural organisations.
2. These major initiatives are part of the government's ongoing commitment to developing the creative abilities of young people. Most recently, they are referred to in *Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools*, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003.
3. It was in this context that over five terms, beginning in September 2001, a group of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) from Ofsted undertook a small-scale survey to identify good practice in the promotion of creativity in schools. The inspection methodology and the nature of the schools visited are set out in annex A.

## Definition

4. The inspection took as its definition of creativity that used in the NACCCE report:

***Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value.***

*Creative processes have four characteristics. First, they always involve thinking or behaving **imaginatively**. Second, this imaginative activity is **purposeful**: that is, it is directed to achieve an objective. Third, these processes must generate something **original**. Fourth, the outcome must be of **value** in relation to the objective.*

5. In contacting and visiting schools, this definition was used by all inspectors, therefore providing a common starting point for any ensuing discussions and judgements.
6. Emphasis throughout the survey was placed on teaching *for* creativity, in other words, provision that enabled pupils to be creative, rather than on creative teaching in itself.

## Main findings

- The vast majority of creative work in the 42 schools visited was at least good, with around 20% exceptionally good. This generally high quality is likely to be sustained because teachers are committed to the promotion of creativity, have the active support of senior management in this promotion, possess good subject knowledge, and a sufficiently broad range of pedagogical skills to foster creativity in all pupils, whatever their ability.
- Where creative work was no more than satisfactory (less than one in ten of the examples), teaching constrained rather than liberated pupils' imagination and pupils had either insufficient subject knowledge or skill to fashion their ideas successfully.
- Schools which promote creativity effectively are outward-looking, welcoming the perspectives that external agencies and individuals bring to them, including local education authority (LEA) programmes focusing specifically on creative development and national initiatives like Creative Partnerships.

## Commentary

7. With creativity given so high a priority at the present time it is not surprising to find schools wanting to talk about it – what it is, why it is important to promote it, and how best to do this. However, as this report indicates, the creativity observed in children is not associated with a radical new pedagogy – though some teachers feel it might be, if only they can find what it is – but a willingness to observe, listen and work closely with children to help them develop their ideas in a purposeful way. While the stimulus and structures which enable creativity to happen differ somewhat from subject to subject, this focused engagement with the individual pupil – even within a group situation – is common to all the creative work which HMI observed, and is of course common to all good teaching. Such one-to-one dialogue is not always easy to develop. It requires, for instance, the particular skills of listening, interpreting and evaluating, a high level of subject knowledge, and time. It also needs a particular environment: one in which creativity is recognised and celebrated.

8. For this reason, school leadership that is committed to promoting creativity is vital. Not only does this, in a sense, permit teachers and pupils to work creatively but also helps to ensure good practice is recognised, resourced and disseminated widely. The creativity which all the schools visited demonstrated, to a lesser or greater extent, also benefits from outside help – the expertise of museums, galleries, artists, science centres and so on. Where this is most effective is where schools are clear about what expertise is needed, how it will be best deployed and, importantly, how its effects can be sustained.

## Standards of achievement

9. Throughout the inspection, examples of creative work were observed in a number of different settings, for example, in formal lessons, rehearsals for a school play or concert, or in discussions with individual children that focused on something they had created. Each creative opportunity was associated with different kinds of outcome: some most obviously related to pupils' social development and others to their personal and cultural, and even their spiritual development. In the following examples of good practice, while not every aspect of the NACCCE definition was apparent at the time of the inspection, there was sufficient evidence to suggest that the four aspects, imagination, purposefulness, originality and value, would in time be met. Some of the examples also highlight other aspects of creativity referred to in the NACCCE report. These include a confidence in one's own abilities, a willingness to take risks and to be enterprising, and persistence in seeing something through to completion.

10. In Example 1, children's creativity is being encouraged at an early age,

*In this nursery class, the activity started with pupils exploring the different properties of clay and the way the texture changed with the addition of more water. While doing this, one child noticed that the water was in danger of flowing off the table. A child who had hitherto been quite reticent about getting involved in the activity now became far more interested. The teacher asked the child what he would do to stop the water flowing away. This led to a discussion and experimentation with a range of solutions to the problem, which absorbed the children's interest for over half an hour.*

11. In Example 2, older primary children are faced with an expressive problem, the resolution of which requires the accommodation of at least three different demands: stylistic, spatial and skill-related.

*As part of a history topic on the Tudors a small group of Key Stage 2 pupils in this two-teacher school were developing a carefully researched dance sequence, to form part of a 'Tudor Evening' for parents. The period style dance had been choreographed by the teacher and the pupils over two or three weeks. Up to this point the rehearsals had been held in one end of the school hall, but now that the stage had been erected they discovered they had less than half the space they had anticipated. This presented the teacher and the pupils with a dilemma: how to retain the essence of the dance but in a much smaller space than that used previously, where travelling movements were going to prove difficult. The problem was solved largely by one of the girls during a break in rehearsals. Working alone, she sketched out in movement an alternative sequence for herself, on a much smaller scale, which captured the meaning and dynamics of the original, yet had an elegance all of its own. Demonstrating this to members of the group, she tentatively suggested ways in which their own contributions could be remodelled accordingly.*

12. In Example 3, a Year 4 pupil describes his ideas for a component of a sensory garden which the school, with help from the community, wants to build. The head-teacher knows that the child is interested in inventing things and gives him a practical challenge. As with many other children interviewed about their creative

work, this pupil has considerable self confidence even though, at this stage, his ideas are only half-formed.

*The pupil showed me the drawings he had done for what he called his 'brain machine': essentially a machine for testing general knowledge. The head had asked him to think about how he might be able to use two large plastic pipes which someone had donated to the school (they look like gas pipes). In one sketch, he had drawn apertures on the pipes for either 'yes' or 'no' answers. Down the side of the drawing were possible questions, which he had researched in the library. He said that he or a helper would ask the questions and then players would put a token in either the 'yes' or 'no' slot. If they got the answer right, a white ball would roll down the tube. "It's a matter of connecting up the answers with the machinery in the back of the tubes. I've seen something like it on TV so I know it can be done."*

13. In Example 4, a pupil has developed a piece of work which while located in a particular art tradition, is also uniquely personal. Although he has called on professional expertise to record the piece, the ideas are his alone. This recognition that one may not have all the expertise to realise a project, but sufficient enough to know what one does not know, was also observed in very young children: as in a nursery school where pupils worked with a professional welder to make their own version of the Angel of the North. In this particular example of creative work, the Year 13 pupil is on an A-level art and design course.

*This performance art project was video-recorded professionally and won a prize at the Kilburn Film Festival. It shows a meal being prepared, packed in a hamper, and then served as a formal dinner to guests on a Jubilee Line train travelling from Stanmore to Central London. A student sets out the table with a cloth, cutlery, candelabra, and so on. At a particular stop, his friends (in dinner jackets and long frocks) board the train and sit around the table. Wine is poured and they eat the meal, offering helpings to bemused passengers. When the meal is over, the 'guests' alight at their station. The host then packs everything away in his hamper and then leaves the train.*

14. The outcomes of such work are described in different ways by schools but, frequently, teachers refer to creative work leading to improvements in self-confidence. This can be expressed in different and sometimes quite subject-specific ways: more willingness to 'take risks in art', use a modern foreign language more frequently, increased receptiveness to peer review, or more 'flexibility'.

15. In the best practice, creativity is being developed in all pupils, whatever their ability. Within this context, gifted and talented children are given opportunities to realise their creative potential. In an after-school performing arts club, for instance, a mixed group of Year 9 to 11 pupils in one school had produced a play for an audience of adults and children.

*It was based on the stimulus of the 'unwanted present' and involved a group of 'boxed presents' talking to each other, the child for whom the presents had been bought, and the child's parents. The pupils had helped to shape the narrative, the characterisation and verbal humour, which was sharp and witty. They were particularly skilled at presenting character cameos based on and disciplined by observations of well-known toys or film characters. Out of this*

*devising process (improvised drama and musical composition) seeds of excellence had been recognised and fostered by the teacher to produce a group of performers who had developed considerable self-confidence, both as makers and performers of plays; an elite had emerged, but not out of elitism.*

## Quality of teaching

16. The overwhelming majority of lessons observed were good or better, with more than one in four outstanding. While many, if not all, of the features leading to the successful development of creativity are apparent in all good teaching, the following were judged to be particularly important.

### An understanding of creativity

17. Teachers who inspire creativity have a clear understanding of what it means to be creative. Although they are not always able to put this understanding into words, they can often, if appropriate, model the creative process for pupils, with all the attendant risk-taking this can involve. An English teacher in a poetry lesson, for example, shared a word association method when trying to shape an image which described the wet, grey landscape outside the classroom window, admitting, finally, that the metaphors he had selected were *'not quite right'*. Elsewhere, an art teacher described to a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) class the problems she was trying to solve in the design of the title page for the school magazine, which had to appeal both to parents and pupils. The pupils were able to relate this dilemma to a design project they themselves were working on. By working with pupils in such ways, teachers help to validate and elucidate often complex processes where solutions are not always easy to find.

18. On the other hand, a display of personal artistry can inhibit pupils' creativity. In a Year 7 drama lesson, for instance, the device of 'teacher in role' was played so expertly and with such conviction that pupils appeared cowed by the teacher's performance. In a small primary school, a visiting visual artist dominated the activity so much that it was difficult to appreciate how the pupils would be able to contribute anything significant to a sculpture project.

19. Many teachers ask their pupils to *'be creative'*, *'off the wall'* or *'wacky'*, permitting them to think outside of accepted patterns or *'out of the box'*, to take risks and not to rely on the production of predictable outcomes. Exemplifying this approach was the primary teacher who told her class: *'the unexpected is expected in my lessons'*.

20. Where the unexpected is expected is in certain kinds of children's play. This is most apparent in primary schools where the conditions required for imaginative play to flourish are often carefully arranged.

*Following the work with the artist, teachers have developed their own scenarios for developing infants' imaginative play. For example, what had been confined to a home corner has now become an area where staff and children build new, imaginary environments, for example, a jungle or a woodland camp site. The*



*area has a wide range of materials and textures and sound sources. As a regular part of their week, pupils spend time acting out stories and plays. Sometimes, through careful interventions, teachers and classroom assistants help them to develop abstract thinking through these fictions.*

21. Drawing, in a variety of media, is associated with play and playfulness in much early years teaching. Children often tell stories through their drawings, talking about what is happening as they draw. In secondary schools the potential of drawing for releasing and articulating ideas, while an integral part of art and design and design and technology (D&T), was also evident in other subjects such as religious education and geography. In one geography lesson, for example, Year 8 pupils produced annotated drawings of the potential effects of particular planning decisions on a local landscape.

22. Effective teachers are interested in how children learn. Some of those involved in the survey took an interest in recent developments in learning theory such as those associated with Howard Gardner, and techniques such as mind-mapping, used successfully in one D&T department to organise thoughts and create lines of enquiry. In a few cases this knowledge was being developed through mentoring teacher trainees or study for a higher degree. There is, however, no evidence from the survey of any one teaching strategy arising from a particular interest in learning theory having a significant effect on teachers' promotion of creativity. The most successful teachers are pragmatic and open to new possibilities, wherever or however they occur.

### **Providing the opportunity**

23. In successful teaching for creativity, teachers know not only what it is they are promoting but also how to create opportunities for this to happen. Usually this means providing pupils with challenges where there is no clear-cut solution and in which pupils can exert individual or group ownership. In one dance class, for example:

*Year 6 pupils exceeded their own expectations through work on Capoeira (a Brazilian/Cuban martial art developed by slaves) which led them to choreographing a dance and then performing it to their peers and for the camera. Their evident surprise at what they could do, as well as their confident experimentation were tangible outcomes of this highly creative work.*

24. In addition, effective teachers are alert to happy accidents, using these to benefit pupils' learning, as in one nursery class where, on a windy day, pupils were given a sari and toys which stuck to the high nursery fence: a phenomenon which the teacher later used again to explore with pupils how materials react to natural forces.

25. Often strange or unfamiliar juxtapositions generate ideas. In a D&T lesson, where pupils had been encouraged to 'go out on a limb', some ideas for the design of a new concept telephone developed out of the premise that the eye rather than the ear would be the main receptor.

*The students played with the ideas of suction pads holding the phone-piece over the eye, using eye movement to dial up, and arm tattoos to act as key pads.*

## Subject knowledge

26. Teachers who inspire creativity have good subject knowledge or sufficient knowledge to know when to call on external expertise. Furthermore, they recognise that pupils also need secure knowledge for developing their own ideas successfully. In a geography lesson, for instance, where pupils had to design winter outfits for residents of Sapporo, Northern Japan and Naha, Southern Japan, pupils had to have a good grasp of the climatic differences between these different parts of the country and express this understanding in their designs. In another subject, physical education (PE), the teacher spoke of undertaking,

*A 'reality check' to see that pupils have a movement vocabulary from which they can select, adapt and refine. If you give pupils basic skills, for example, rolling – how to generate momentum, keep control through shape and tension – they can use these expressively.*

27. In many of the art and design and drama lessons observed, high levels of creative work were associated with pupils' ability to observe, analyse and use – often with authority – different codes of representation. Where this was not the case – where self-expression was given too high a premium – the work was often shallow and undemanding.

28. Besides a secure knowledge and understanding of their own specialist areas, effective teachers show curiosity and willingness to look outside of these subjects to see connections and associations with other parts of the curriculum, and they encourage their pupils to do the same. For instance, in one secondary school, experiments with using a pin-hole camera in science had been extended into making and using similar optical devices in D&T and art and design, with resulting images recorded digitally and then manipulated on a computer to enhance their expressive effect.

29. The purposefulness of successful creative work is often associated with real life situations, problems and challenges. Establishing such situations convincingly is dependent on the teacher's subject knowledge, as in a drama based on the slave trade, which was grounded in a detailed understanding of its historical context, derived from scrutiny of both secondary and primary source materials made available in a local maritime museum.

## Relationships

30. Teachers who are able to promote creativity are often good team players, willing to listen to and learn from colleagues, though not always uncritically. Inspectors often referred to the buzz to be found in creative schools and departments and the way creative teachers seemed to inspire each other.

*In this strong sharing culture, teachers were receptive to – and valued – the contributions of colleagues. There was a willingness to take risks and explore alternatives.*

31. A few headteachers noted that older, more experienced teachers were much better at adapting to the demands of teaching for creativity. In the words of one, *'they are less mindful of orthodoxies'*.

32. Many teachers who stimulate creativity establish a relaxed relationship with their pupils, but one in which high demands are placed upon them. One modern foreign languages (MFL) teacher talked of *'breaking the barrier between them and us...but also establishing clear ground rules...and not letting inaccurate language go uncorrected'*. These teachers use questioning effectively to draw out ideas and to consolidate learning. In a successful Year 4 primary mathematics lesson, for example, the teacher kept pupils on their toes with challenges such as: *'The answer is 25, so what is the question?'*

33. Effective teachers know their pupils well and find ways of stimulating the creativity of each. In one secondary drama lesson, for instance, where props and costumes were used as a stimulus for learning, the teacher observed that it was the costume that suggested the character and even the plot for some pupils. On the other hand, for other pupils, these resources were a distraction, leading them away from better ideas; an observation the teacher was able to exploit in later work. In a special school, where the major focus of the teaching was on engaging and motivating pupils, teachers used practical stimuli in highly inventive ways. In geography, for instance, when studying rivers, the pupils with moderate learning difficulties built a plaster model of a river system with their teachers to help them to understand and memorise geographical features and terminology.

## Assessment

34. In schools which promote creativity effectively, successes and failures are both perceived to offer learning opportunities. The ability to give and take criticism is often seen by teachers as an essential part of creative activity. In a Year 12 print-making class the teacher said: *'just try it – don't be afraid of getting your hands dirty. Later on, we'll look at the prints which were more successful and try and understand why'*. In one MFL department, pupils' language skills were assessed via videoed puppet shows, songs and poetry renditions: the pupils demonstrating their skills in creatively demanding ways.

## Curriculum organisation

35. Creative work is often linked explicitly to the National Curriculum programmes of study. In one primary school for instance, the Year 6 teacher planned for creative outcomes – physical and attitudinal – in her drama work, but linked these to National Curriculum objectives, especially in literacy, mathematics and the humanities. In another school the head of modern foreign language's coverage of the National Curriculum programme of study was much wider than is usually the case, especially of those elements which foster creativity and the use of the imagination. In PE,

although creative opportunities tended to be found in the dance and gymnastics parts of the PE curriculum – and often accorded less curricular time than other aspects – there was some evidence of pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 applying their creativity in devising strategies and tactics in game situations.

36. Creative work also often needs unbroken time to develop. Primary schools which maintained sufficient flexibility in their timetables for lessons to be blocked or extended to accommodate planned events or just to provide more time for creative activities, found it easier to enable this kind of development. This flexibility also allowed some schools to bring children of different ages together for particular projects. In one area, primary and secondary schools joined together in creative activities as part of a project to improve transition arrangements. Elsewhere, in a primary school where the arts were given high priority, they were normally taught on a weekly basis but there were occasions when an afternoon, two days or a whole week were devoted to arts-related projects. This enabled pupils to work at length and in some depth and to complete pieces of creative work successfully, including a battery operated fairground ride, and a lengthy project involving Year 6 pupils working with media students from the local further education college.

37. In another primary school, a Year 2 project on the emotions involving personal, social and health education (PSHE), music, art and drama, used flexibly a combination of all the time allocated to each individual subject over a week (210 minutes). Subject emphases varied from week to week depending on the way the project developed.

38. Of the schools visited some of the most flexible were nursery schools, in some cases schools which had been associated with the Reggio Emilia philosophy.<sup>1</sup> For example:

*One child had visited Blackpool and become fascinated by the Blackpool Tower. When she came back to school, she talked a great deal about it and made several drawings of it. She then began to use building blocks to make models of it but was not satisfied with the results. One of her teachers was on a visit to Blackpool and, knowing of the child's interest, took a picture of part of the tower. When the child saw the photograph, she realised that the tower was not made of blocks but of girders and therefore decided that she would need to take a very different approach to the problem. By this stage, the whole school had become interested in the child's endeavours. As a consequence of this, the staff decided to involve all the children in finding a solution to the problem. It was suggested by some of the children that beanpoles might be better than blocks. Therefore, the school invested in these and made space available in the school's workshop, so that the project could be pursued over a prolonged period of time and to ensure that there was sufficient height to accommodate the construction. The meticulous recording of the development of the project showed clearly how the school had adapted to the unexpected and given time and space for it to become a prolonged, detailed and challenging project.*

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<sup>1</sup> A philosophy developed in Northern Italy relating to early years education, which gives 3 to 5 year olds considerable autonomy, with adults providing the resources, skills and understanding for children to realise their creative intentions.

39. In many of the schools, cross-curricular opportunities were often a structured feature of the school year or were fostered as a routine part of the school's activities. In one secondary school, for example, collaborative work between D&T and science led to the design of pond-dipping equipment; and in another school, an art and design department used multi-media technology to create projected scenery for an English department's production of *Twelfth Night*. Elsewhere, a Year 4 art project covered learning objectives in science, English, history as well as art and design:

*Having learned about the form, pattern and symbolism of Tudor portraits, pupils visited the National Portrait Gallery with the teacher and resident etcher. Pupils recognised many of the paintings and were amazed at their small size. They sketched the figures and examples of the background patterns. Back at school, given a small sheet of copper they developed their designs to that size. They covered every stage of the process guided by the artist. The highlight was a visit to the artist's studio to use her printing press where they experienced the thrill of seeing their designs unfold. The project lasted a whole week.*

40. In secondary schools, productive and sustained links between subjects were not necessarily brought about through structural arrangements such as faculties – creative arts faculties, for example. Subject departments, indeed, often flourished in their difference rather than in an imposed and artificial commonality.

## Accommodation and resources

41. Most of the creative work took place in good quality accommodation, where for instance, in the arts, pupils had the physical space to develop their ideas and where ongoing work could be left untouched. However, this was not always the case. Some creative work took place in poor accommodation, though – importantly – pupils had easy access to it, with drama and art and design studios, for instance, left open during lunch-hours and break-times.

42. Specific resources can raise the creative potential of a lesson, inspiring ideas and trains of thought. In PE, in one primary school, for instance, the use of mats in different colours and mathematical shapes prompted pupils to think about shapes in movement. Elsewhere, Years 4 and 5 pupils, working with an externally funded professional photographer who specialised in digital photography, made powerful autobiographical statements using disposable cameras bought especially for the project.

43. Visual and other resources can, however, render little, if used unimaginatively. In one D&T department:

*Although the designing takes place in an environment which appears to be supportive of design, with much made of famous design icons, the shallow use made of these ideas means that the work is often no better than the derivative work found when these pupils use *The Simpsons* or Mickey Mouse motifs.*

## Creative partnerships

44. Many of the schools in the survey have benefited from involvement in external initiatives such as Creative Partnerships and various LEA schemes aimed at promoting creativity. While many of the former have had little effect on the schools visited (during the time of the inspection many were still being established and in some cases had yet to appoint key personnel) the scheme had at the very least generated a positive interest. In some cases, it brought headteachers, LEA personnel and representatives from arts organisations together in what some schools perceived to be potentially productive forums. However, where key players were not in concert philosophically, the forming of a successful partnership was proving difficult.

45. The LEAs visited have been promoting creativity through the arts for some time. One, involving 37 schools, is built on an LEA tradition of centrally-funded arts projects. It provides each of the participating schools with access to funding, support from a project manager, and opportunities for teachers to be involved in action research to demonstrate measurable gains from their respective projects – which all involve artists working with schools. While the initiative in the beginning had an arts focus, it has actively encouraged different areas of the curriculum to interact. The scrutiny of work in a range of the schools involved suggests that the scheme stimulates teachers to think afresh about how they teach and how pupils learn. Crucial in this respect has been the role of artists, whose working methods have helped teachers to review familiar pedagogical practices and to try new approaches.

46. Another LEA project involves schools in an annual arts education festival. This highly successful initiative provides opportunities for the different visual and performing arts to work together in exploring selected festival themes, such as the slave trade. The project includes schools in an in-service training programme running over almost the full school year, culminating in two weeks of public performances and exhibitions and underpinned by extensive research. In addition to the LEA advisers who manage the project, the LEA funds the employment of practising artists, designers, musicians and consultants to support the festival each year. The input of these specialists is a key factor in the success of the project. Over the years, the festival has also built up a body of expertise in schools, which is drawn on for general in-service work and to disseminate good practice.

47. Resources for teachers and pupils to promote creativity are provided in another LEA through what it calls a creative hub. Two rooms in a teachers' centre have been converted to include ICT facilities, and spaces for drama and music, within which LEA specialist advisers work effectively with pupils on various projects which they then complete in school.

48. Such projects are having a positive effect on pupils' creative work in different ways. Nevertheless, uncertainty about future education funding is now causing some schools to doubt whether these positive effects can be sustained from their own or their LEA's budgets. A more general issue related to external funding is the amount of time spent by schools in bidding for what is often a relatively small amount of money, which disinclines some headteachers to participate further.

## Promoting creativity

### Leadership

49. In most schools visited, the headteacher placed the development of creativity high on the school's list of priorities, often seeing its promotion as a means of meeting other priorities. For instance, two creative projects in two different schools included in their respective aims: the improvement of boys' writing; and the raising of standards in spoken and written language in order to improve Key Stage 2 attainment (the latter also being an LEA Education Development Plan priority). In none of the schools was the promotion of creativity seen as inimical to the raising of standards – quite the contrary. However, in some secondary schools, particular departments demonstrated this dual commitment to high standards and creativity more vigorously than others. In one highly creative art department, for instance, one sixth former said *'this is the only department that **tells me** that it expects me to get an A grade.'*

50. Creativity was rarely perceived by headteachers as being the preserve of certain subjects, but something that could be developed in all areas of the curriculum. The arts were, nevertheless, seen as key creative subjects. For instance one secondary headteacher who vigorously asserted that creativity was *'vital to the health of my school'* also observed that *'we tend to associate it with the arts, though we haven't discussed this in any philosophical way'*.

51. While in some cases a commitment to creativity was enshrined in a policy statement and a documented strategy, more often than not it was the personal advocacy and energy of the headteacher which drove the school in this direction. In one school in particular:

*Clearly, she (the headteacher) is the driving force. She says 'yes' to any invitation to take part in community events, however 'disruptive', and while not all her staff have the adaptability she requires, she has won them over philosophically.*

### Influential teachers

52. Other than the headteacher, many schools in the survey had two or three teachers whose strong interest in creativity within a subject – including non-arts subjects – was helping the rest of the staff to develop the disposition and pedagogy to promote creativity themselves. Some of these teachers have advanced skills status. One secondary Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) with responsibility for PE described her approach in the following way:

*I try to be an inspiration to others, both pupils and teachers. There's no point in doing the same things the same way day in and day out. You become too predictable. You need routines, but I try to adapt and be flexible with my content and to look for different ways of doing things with different classes. You*

*need to have a fresh eye and I think there is always another way, perhaps another approach. I try to surprise my classes. It's an attitude of mind!*

53. Some teachers have developed in-service training programmes for colleagues, which in one infant school includes training for learning support assistants in the Reggio Emilia philosophy. In one primary school, the arts co-ordinator had provided workshops for local industrialists on the promotion of creativity and was consequently able to draw on this experience in the training of her colleagues. Arising out of a training course she had attended, one head of a secondary religious education (RE) department had written a policy statement on spiritual development in which she offered thoughtful definitions of both creativity and spirituality, and their interrelationship.

54. Many heads of department praised senior managers for actively encouraging them to develop creativity within the subject, drawing on external expertise as they saw fit. As one subject leader said, *'the senior management allows space for the art department to develop'*. Another said, *'I feel I can take risks if these help to move us forward'*. In a few schools, this commitment extended to the allocation of additional funds to departments to develop particular projects which might be of benefit to the whole school.

### **Willingness to use and learn from external expertise and perspectives**

55. All the schools visited valued external expertise and perspectives because these could complement or extend existing subject knowledge. This use of external resources also provided the real world experiences and contexts upon which much of the more creative work depended. In one school, in D&T, for example, a young professional designer worked with pupils as part of the Designers in School initiative. In another school, Year 9 pupils eavesdropped on the Royal Court Theatre's worldwide playwriting project in which playwrights wrote a play collectively on the Internet. In a secondary school involved in developing links with its feeder schools, the expertise of the Royal Shakespeare Company's education department was drawn on in a cross-phase project leading to the production of a Shakespeare play. Also, as part of the same enterprise, primary teachers benefited from the specialist drama teaching provided by the secondary school.

56. Museums and galleries often provided valuable expertise. In one secondary school, science, English and D&T specialists worked closely with a museum education officer on a project on the physics of light, inspired by the study of Turner's landscape paintings. This, in turn, stimulated some highly evocative computer-manipulated imagery. In a primary school, a local museum in a small town posed a real design challenge, involving pupils in the redesign of the museum refreshments area.

57. Schools which promote creativity are generally outward looking in other ways. For example, many have close links with other countries, through involvement in national competitions and arts events, for instance. While these provide an important experience of cultural diversity, they also give pupils another perspective on themselves, described by one Year 12 boy (after a visit to Croatia with the school



theatre group) as ‘*seeing yourself and your own school and country in a different (and not always favourable) light*’. Throughout the survey, this ability – and willingness – to see the familiar in a different way is a characteristic of creative pupils and teachers, and creative institutions.

## **A stimulating physical environment**

58. Most schools placed great store on displaying pupils’ work effectively, using these displays to both stimulate and celebrate the creativity.

*The quality of the school strikes you as you enter the spacious lobby which is tastefully arranged and enhanced by framed samples of pupils’ work. Throughout the school, in classrooms and circulation areas, there is a sense of order and signs of pupils’ successes being celebrated. Art work ranges from small etchings of stringed instruments to large models of fishing boats and batik banners hanging from high ceilings in the learning resources area.*

59. There was, however, a small minority of schools producing highly creative work in particular subjects, whose achievements had not yet been seen outside of departmental walls.

*Paradoxically, there was little to suggest, from first impressions, that the school placed much value on creativity. There was little or no display of pupils’ work and very little celebration of recent or current achievements in areas around the school.*

60. Sometimes, displays were used successfully to articulate often ‘untidy’ creative processes: the first tentative drawings and the final, realised product in D&T; facsimiles of famous writers’ notebooks, expressing the turmoil of initial ideas; or early drawings for projects in art and design. In one secondary art department, vocational projects had been recorded on computer using a digital camera: not just the finished results, but also the creative ways these had been developed.

61. Many schools, especially primary schools, used all the available space to engage the imagination and curiosity of children, including outdoor spaces. In one nursery school, for instance, the outside area included sculpture made by the children, large objects they had found, a vegetable garden, a climbing area and several dens and exploration areas. Pupils had access to this area throughout the year and outdoor wear was readily available for the children whenever they wished to take advantage of the garden. In another primary school, the re-landscaping of the grounds had become a project involving the design skills of pupils and many of their parents.

## **Barriers to promoting creativity**

62. While a small minority of schools have clear policy statements on promoting creativity and have developed a shared understanding of the concept, there are many schools where there is some uncertainty or vagueness about what is being sought and enabled in pupils. For some teachers, creativity is a synonym for the arts, or implies the use of the arts to teach another non-arts subject. In this context, the

use of the term 'creative arts' is possibly unhelpful. Teachers in some schools also perceive creativity primarily as them and their pupils doing something 'different', as in one geography department where pupils ate popcorn with chopsticks as part of a project on Japan. While such unusual approaches often have value in the learning process, they are not in themselves creative activities.

Other barriers include:

- An inability to recognise, what one head called '*the creative moment*' and thus the help a pupil needs to move forward. In one school for example, the groping for visual ideas represented in a student's sketchbook was perceived as '*aimless doodling*' by a non-specialist supply teacher with the consequence that the pupil reverted to a stereotyped response to the challenge he had set himself.
- Not letting go. For some teachers, there is unwillingness, perhaps based on shaky subject knowledge, to let pupils find their own solution to problems. In mathematics, for example, pupils in some schools are taught standard computational methods first rather than finding ways of adding and subtracting for themselves.
- Spurious links between subjects. While some of the most creative work observed in this survey was interdisciplinary (see above), some of the least creative work was also found in such contexts. For example, in one lesson, music-making was used to illustrate scientific concepts, resulting in music as crude sound effects and underdeveloped conceptual understanding; or, in another lesson, painting and drawing were used in RE to 'investigate' religious concepts, resulting in visual clichés. In both cases, the teachers' sincere attempts to invigorate pupils' learning and provide creative opportunities were undermined by a lack of subject knowledge, especially of the arts.
- ICT used inappropriately. In the visual arts, in primary schools more than secondary schools, teachers and pupils were sometimes too easily impressed by the effects produced by certain kinds of software. In such situations, teachers often did not have the knowledge and skill to help pupils to use these effects creatively; occasionally leaving pupils entirely to their own devices.
- The island of excellence. In some secondary subject departments there was high-quality creative work and concomitant high standards, which went unrecognised in the rest of the school. This situation betrayed a lack of understanding by senior managers of what makes these departments successful and the mechanisms needed for sharing and extending good practice.
- Overly constraining curricular organisation. Most schools, particularly primary schools, showed considerable flexibility in their timetabling arrangements, with project time blocked at different points in the year, for example. However, in a minority of cases, a predictable, rigid timetable reduced the capacity of teachers to forge the productive curricular links often associated with high-quality creative work.

- Limited extra-curricular opportunities. Most schools visited provide a rich extra-curricular programme, enabling pupils to become involved in a wide range of potentially creative opportunities such as school plays and music-making events. However, a few schools serving broad catchment areas which are dependent on inflexible transport arrangements were unable to do this routinely.
- Other imperatives. A few schools found it difficult to balance the demands for high test and examination results or the demands of public accountability for improving performance in national tests in the core subjects, with a creativity agenda. However, while these aspirations were not irreconcilable, they did create unproductive tensions.

## Conclusion

63. Although there can be barriers to the promotion of creativity, these can be overcome. First, however, teachers and school leaders have to recognise that the development of creativity in pupils is an essential part of their job, and then an appropriate climate has to be established. The danger lies in such an aspiration being seen as modish, or just one other thing to add to schools' lists of priorities. Creativity is not a new concept in education, and many schools, as this survey shows, have found ways of promoting it, simply and effectively.

## **Annex A: inspection methodology**

In most cases the focus of the visit was pupils' work. This was either work that had been completed or work which was in the process of being completed and was, in the view of the school, illustrative of the creative processes described in the NACCCE report. This work helped to anchor the one-day inspections, which comprised discussions with pupils and teachers, scrutiny of planning documents and observations of teaching and learning. All the subjects of the National Curriculum received attention, though most visits had only one or two subject focuses. As part of the visits to some participating schools, inspectors observed LEA-run in-service training sessions.

Informing the work of the inspection team was a desk study of recent Ofsted publications to find out what the organisation already knew about the factors associated with creativity; and a scrutiny of published QCA materials arising from the agency's own extensive work in this area.

## Annex B: schools visited

The 42 schools visited were chosen because they had already been identified through section 10 inspections as likely to exemplify good practice in the promotion of creativity, or were schools working closely with LEA creativity projects. They represented a range of socio-economic contexts and included nursery, infant, primary, secondary and special schools.

### Nursery Schools

Wingate Nursery School	Durham
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### Infant Schools

Trimdon Grange Infant and Nursery School	Durham
Turnfurlong Infant School	Buckinghamshire
Willerby Carr Lane Infant School	East Riding
Wingate Infant School	Durham

### Primary Schools

All Saints CofE Primary School and Nursery	Warwickshire
Ashmead Combined School	Buckinghamshire
Birchfield Primary School	Manchester
Bomere Heath CofE Primary School	Shropshire
Brecknock Primary School	Camden
Millfields First School	Worcestershire
Burton Agnes CofE Primary School	East Riding
Clifton-upon-Dunsmore CofE Primary School	Warwickshire
Cottingham Croxby Primary School	East Riding
Easington Collier Primary School	Durham
Gallions Primary School	Newham
Hornsea Community Primary School	East Riding
Manor Primary School	Newham
Medlock Primary School	Manchester
Middleton-inTeasdale Nursery and Primary School	Durham
Oswald Road Primary School	Manchester
St John's CofE Primary School	Dorset
St Marie's RC Primary	Rugby
Wearhead Primary School	Durham

## Secondary Schools

Acland Burghley School	Camden
Abraham Moss High School	Manchester
Astor College for the Arts	Kent
Bullers Wood School	Bromley
Ernulf Community Schgool	Cambridgeshire
Fairfield High School	Halton
Hampstead School	Camden
Harris CofE School	Warwickshire
Headlands School	East Riding
Intake High School	Leeds
Maidstone Grammar School for Girls	Kent
North Leamington Community School and Arts College	Warwickshire
Pudsey Grangefield School	Leeds
Ravens Wood School	Bromley
Ripley St Thomas CofE High School	Lancashire
The Greneway Middle School	Hertfordshire
Werneth School	Stockport

## Community Special Schools

King's Mill School	East Riding
Stretton Brook School	Staffordshire

## Annex C: creativity checklist

In reviewing its progress in this area, the following questions might prove helpful to schools:

- Does the school have a commitment to promoting creativity: how is this expressed?
- Has creativity been discussed as a concept?
- Have the views of different subject areas been considered?
- To what extent do subject leaders across the curriculum promote creativity?
- Have examples of particularly creative practice been explored?
- How is good practice in creativity to be identified and disseminated?
- What kinds of continuing professional development might be useful?
- What curriculum opportunities are there for subjects to combine meaningfully?
- Is the timetable sufficiently flexible to allow for creative projects to flourish?
- How does the school environment reflect and stimulate the creative work of the school?
- Do pupils have access to suitable accommodation including ICT facilities?
- Have criteria been identified to allow teachers to assess the development of pupils' creativity from year to year?