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Research Associate Report

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Leadership, literacy and the creative arts:

The role of leadership in the development of teaching literacy
through the creative arts

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Contents

Background	3
Methods	5
Outcomes of the projects	10
Conclusions	13
Implications for others	15
Acknowledgements	16
References	17
Appendix	18

Background

The development of creative approaches to children's learning has been well represented in recent years both in terms of publications, for example *Creativity: Find it, Promote it* (QCA 2003), *Developing Creativity in the Primary School* (NCSL 2004) and strategic initiatives such as the work of Creative Partnerships (a government-funded body that works in collaboration with schools to develop creativity in learning and to encourage participation in high-quality cultural activities; see www.creative-partnerships.com).

This research project investigated how leadership has made an impact on the introduction of teaching and learning materials that link the teaching of literacy to the creative arts (Matthews and Matthews undated). These had been in use at my present school for the past two years and are based on a series of novels, collected short stories, play scripts and poetry anthologies. These texts promote cross-curricular work, particularly in music, art, dance and drama (for further information about the materials and how they have been used in my own school see the Appendix at the end of this report).

The materials are closely related to *Creativity: Find it, Promote it* (QCA 2003) in that creativity is being promoted through:

- setting a clear purpose for pupils' work
- being clear about freedoms and constraints
- firing pupils' imagination through their learning and experiences
- providing an opportunity for schools to work together
- establishing criteria for success
- regularly reviewing work in progress
- providing opportunities to celebrate achievements.

Creativity is seen as improving pupils' self-esteem, motivation and enjoyment. As those encouraged to think creatively and independently become:

- more interested in discovering things for themselves
- more open to new ideas
- keen to work with others to explore ideas
- willing to work beyond lesson time when pursuing an idea or vision

this all results in an increase in levels of achievement and self-esteem.

The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCE) report *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (DfES 1999: 31-3) saw creativity as having four main features:

- using imagination
- pursuing purposes
- being original
- judging value.

They saw headteachers having a crucial role to play in promoting the creative development of pupils and encouraging an ethos in which creativity is valued and supported. They saw the need for senior leaders in school as having a role in conducting an audit of the quality and nature of opportunities for creative and cultural education. This should all link with increased plans for staff development to improve teachers' expertise in creative education, together with a greater emphasis on formative assessment; that is, assessment that will help improve the day-to-day

quality of teaching and learning.

The QCA (2003) also recognised that senior leaders and governors play a vital role in promoting creativity across the school. Some of the key steps that can be taken by school leaders in the promotion of creativity are listed under four headings:

- Putting creativity at the centre
- Providing time
- Providing resources
- Professional learning and development.

Under the first heading they offer the following:

- Build an expectation of creativity into your school's learning and teaching policy.
- Consider providing extended cross-subject projects that give pupils opportunities to take greater control of their learning, work together and make connections between different areas of their learning.
- Try to avoid over-compartmentalised teaching. If pupils see 'the whole picture' and are helped to recognise relationships and patterns in their learning, they will gain a deeper understanding.
- Involve all the school in an event to experience and celebrate creative learning.
- Show and share tangible changes that result from creativity.
- Encourage, recognise and reward pupils' creativity. Ask teachers to nominate examples of creativity and celebrate these at a school or year assembly (see www.ncaction.org.uk/creativity/foster.htm).

NCSL (2004: 5) identified those schools in their study as having the following characteristics:

- learning that is enriched, wherever possible, by first-hand experience and the skills of other adults from the local community and beyond
- a strong sense of vision and professional confidence shared by all staff, and an understanding of what creativity for learning means
- strong, well-established distributed leadership and management, together with an influential headteacher
- high priority given to staff development
- an environment that reflects and promotes the school's commitment to creativity for learning
- a professional culture in which there is a willingness to take risks and in which innovation and imaginative ideas are shared and celebrated.

Methods

This research project investigated how the materials identified and approaches towards their use had been led in three different settings. It did this by exploring the following questions:

- What role has leadership played in the introduction and development of the materials' use?
- What differing levels of leadership were evident?
- How was the work being sustained and developed further?

From this, implications can be offered for leaders wishing to develop similar work in their schools. These are listed at the report's conclusion.

Three different settings were researched:

- a group of schools working together as part of an Education Action Zone (EAZ)
- another group of schools working together as a Network Learning Community (NLC)
- a school working and developing its use of the materials alone.

The methods were mixed and comprised a combination of:

- Semi-structured interviews in each of the three cases with headteachers and other leaders involved including subject leaders and where appropriate, external consultants. Some of the interviews were with individual leaders and teachers; others were with groups. All interviews were carefully transcribed.
- I also attended a number of meetings, which included:
 - launch day training event of the Rotherham EAZ project
 - a number of meetings with participating teachers and coordinators
 - end-of-project feedback and future strategy meeting of the Rotherham EAZ. This included the issuing of an end-of-project written report
 - a meeting between the curriculum sub-committee and the headteacher of a school as part of the Leicester NLC.
- Classroom observations of literacy lessons across a sample of the case study schools.
- I was able to view some I studied a report compiled by the independent consultant attached to the Rotherham EAZ, as well as a more detailed analysis of English results at one of the participating schools.

Each school's practice and the leadership dimension within it will be the focus of the following case studies.

Case Study 1: North West EAZ, Rotherham

This project involved 10 primary schools working together. The schools were feeder schools to two main secondary schools. Initial and ongoing leadership was provided by two consultants who had been appointed to work for the EAZ, one being the literacy consultant, the other the consultant for creative arts. The two consultants were aiming to introduce a project across the zone that combined their two areas of responsibility.

They had seen the materials and related approaches at work in another school in the local education authority (LEA) and so consequently the materials were to be introduced and trialled in all the schools. The project was closely linked to one of the

EAZ's own targets – to raise standards of writing, in particular raising boys' attainments. This was also reflected in most of the schools' own improvement plans. The schools were interested in working together on a project that was closely related to the development of excellence and enjoyment across the curriculum.

The schools welcomed this opportunity to have shared ownership of the project as it seemed to give them the opportunity to work collaboratively. One teacher commented "less risk if taken collectively", and another pointed out that "this gives us an opportunity to work together to further develop curriculum integration".

The consultants decided to pilot the project in Year 4 in each of the primary schools with a view to its potential extension across all year groups if successful. This was carried out during the spring term 2005. The project would be delivered over half a term although a number of schools extended it further. The reason for choosing Year 4 was that other year groups were already engaged in other projects across the EAZ. The project had the support of the director of the EAZ and the headteachers of all the schools involved. All headteachers were briefed at a special meeting and they also received letters outlining the project.

An independent consultant was engaged to analyse qualitative and quantitative data. He was to look at assessment data (based on the LEA's writing progress guide) alongside qualitative data in the form of children's and teachers' perceptions and associated comments. Data analysis would include looking at samples of unaided writing at the beginning and the end of the project.

All participating teachers were invited to a training day held at a popular venue, which gave a good start to the launch of the project. During the day, the teachers were given time to look at the materials, and to work together to share ideas as to how they would influence their teaching and learning. Consultants provided leadership at this event.

Time was also set aside for the independent consultant to outline the plans for evaluation and assessment. Samples of unaided writing were to be analysed by the consultant, both at the beginning and end of the project. The consultant also outlined his plans for interviewing children and members of staff to ascertain their views on the project as it developed.

The consultants were able at this training day to outline support and training that they were able to provide. This included:

- help and support with planning
- bespoke support for Intensive Support Programme (ISP) schools
- support for newly qualified teachers (NQTs)
- the provision of visiting arts and dance teachers.

All participating schools agreed to share outcomes of the project and further meetings were planned as the project was to develop. The LEA made some extra funding available for further evaluation.

Towards the end of this training day a literacy consultant made three comments that reflect the project's focus and potential benefits:

- "I can see that this project will allow us to move away from the traditional literacy hour and will give us the confidence to develop our own materials."
- "We see the need to enhance the project in our school to bring in outside dance and music expertise."
- "This will hopefully enable us to increase staff confidence and expertise in

these areas.”

The training day enabled some schools to see how they could link other subjects into the project such as geography and history. Others saw it as an opportunity to aid them in the re-shaping of their whole school curriculum. Other aspects of collaboration were planned, such as some schools working together on planning and delivering a Caribbean Carnival.

In the case of the EAZ, consultants took a leading role that included:

- carrying out an audit of staff development needs and subsequently organising external specialists in areas such as dance, drama, music and literature to work alongside teachers to increase knowledge, skills and understanding. In two cases, the headteacher took the lead in ensuring this occurred
- the creation and promotion of professional development opportunities, for example, team teaching, use of specialists for demonstration lessons and support for NQTs
- providing mentors for NQTs
- meeting regularly with Year 4 teachers before, during and after the project to ensure direction was maintained and that monitoring and evaluation of the project was embedded
- developing resource materials
- evaluating the project's success through evaluation of pupil outcomes, including pupil voice via end-of-project questionnaires and group interviews, and reporting these to headteachers
- development work with key teachers and/or literacy coordinators to ensure that once the consultants had left the project, these personnel were equipped to extend the work across the school and provide leadership, that is, building capacity.

The headteachers' role was one either of direct involvement in planning and evaluation or support for the developments such as resource provision, including time.

Case Study 2: NLC, Leicester

This involved a group of schools working together as part of an NLC. A key developmental issue across the network was raising standards in oracy. The two lead headteachers within this NLC had previously visited a school, outside of their area, that was already using the materials.

The materials were launched at a meeting at the beginning of the school year at the University of Leicester that the two lead headteachers organised, and it was decided that the materials were to be trialled in various year groups across the school.

I closely followed the work of one headteacher in relation to how the materials had been introduced and developed in her school. This headteacher was one of the lead learners in the NLC.

The headteachers leading the development of materials across the network believed that they would help address teaching towards different learning styles including boys' needs. Key comments from one headteacher were:

- “They will help make literacy lessons come alive.”
- “The materials will engage the kinesthetic learner.”
- “They will make children get out of their chairs.”

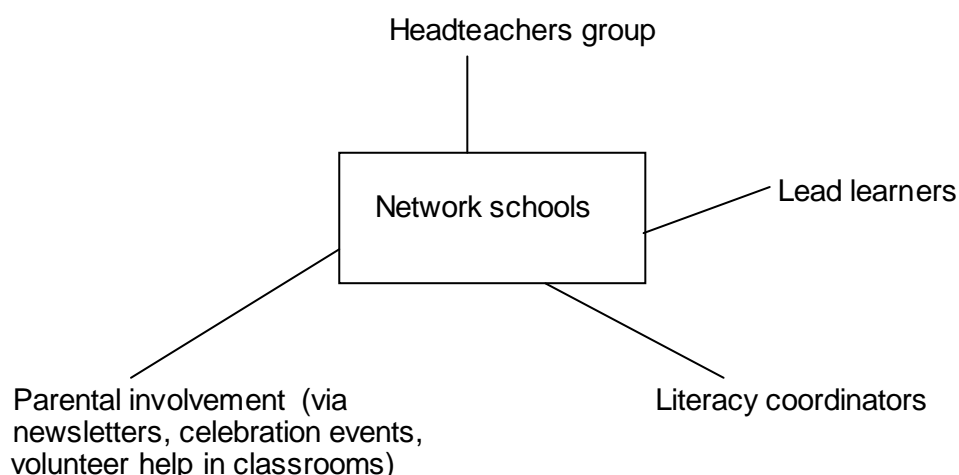
- “They will make the curriculum accessible to all children.”

The materials were also seen by one headteacher as a means to invigorating the more established members of staff: “They will get the teachers moving away from their desks”.

The headteachers would be the driving force for curriculum change and would achieve this through promoting collaboration, modeling risk taking and providing a rationale and framework for re-designing the curriculum. They would help promote the excellence and enjoyment agenda in their schools through their work with this project.

The teachers throughout the network schools expressed a desire to work with the materials. One teacher expressed the view that, “the materials would provide a spring board for child-centred discussion”. The headteachers were to rely on a strong commitment from the staff using the materials, a commitment that was based on risk taking, collaboration and a willingness to share successes.

The leadership of the project involved various leadership groups working together.



There were plans to extend the use of the materials across more year groups in schools if the project was successful. There were also plans to link the project work with other subject areas such as history and geography. The headteachers initiated the provision of staff training opportunities, in particular in drama and music.

The headteacher whom I tracked took a key role in the following ways, the first four of which were within their own school:

- delivering exemplar lessons
- identifying those teachers who would become key players in extending the project across the school
- creating a school-based team comprising these individuals to lead the development comprising themselves, the literacy coordinator, the deputy headteacher and the arts coordinator. The team decided on the self-evaluation strategy to be taken, to include pupil performance outcomes and the involvement of governors. It also determined how teachers across the school would access observation opportunities. The literacy coordinator and deputy head also provided support in planning for teachers
- drawing up and providing governors with support and guidance so they could carry out their monitoring role. A group of governors met with the headteacher fortnightly to monitor progress and, as it was a key focus area for the school, carry out planned classroom observations leading to a

- progress report
- co-leading the network and establishing joint training and development activities as part of this.

Case Study 3: Junior School, Derby

Leadership initially at this school was provided by the headteacher and deputy headteacher who had viewed the materials at the annual Education Show. They believed they would help with the school's current aim of raising standards in reading and writing and would also help address the issue of bringing the curriculum alive.

The school's existing curriculum had been very much based on QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) schemes of work and had been teacher-led with little choice for children. The headteacher and deputy headteacher, both of whom were relatively new to the school, had identified the need for change.

The materials had been trialled in Year 6 at the end of the summer term, which proved to be successful. The school's teachers were very positive about using the materials and adopting a change of approach. A commitment was made to purchase books to supplement the materials so that all children across school would have access to these.

The school's literacy coordinator also played a leading role in developing and promoting this work. She was able to form a viewpoint that the materials were used as a resource and not a scheme and, as part of this, considered that the materials would fit with the key learning objectives the school was to deliver through its curriculum development. Year group leaders would also play a key role in ensuring the materials were delivered consistently and in raising confidence among any staff who were unsure.

Children would now be given the opportunity to read a book from cover to cover rather than being given extracts to work from. The three leaders were working together on cross-curricular links with a focus on subjects including history, geography and design technology. Their intention was to begin to design a whole school curricular map.

It was viewed that the project would help raise the profile of art and dance throughout the school but that further work would be needed with developing basic skills in art. The art subject leader was therefore to be given the role of developing these issues and to formulate an action plan to support this.

In summary, a team approach was also developed. This comprised the headteacher, deputy headteacher and literacy coordinator. The deputy and literacy coordinator:

- trialled the work in one year group with monitoring and evaluation of pupil outcomes
- redesigned the school's curriculum map
- led a series of staff meetings as training events.

The team ensured subject leaders were provided with time to link the materials to their subject areas, and to carry out joint planning.

Outcomes of the projects

Rotherham EAZ

I attended a number of meetings of the EAZ, organised by the consultants. The meetings were held half way through and at the end of the project. It was clear that the consultants had encouraged creative adaptation of the materials. A number of schools had brought other subjects into the project such as history, geography, ICT (information and communications technology) (in particular using Espresso whiteboard software) and numeracy. It was clear the project had had a significant impact on the enjoyment of literacy, in particular engaging boys. There was a significant raising of standards within story writing and performance poetry.

An analysis of writing progress saw 76% of the boys across the project make one or two national curriculum sub-levels of progress, over the project as a whole (one term); 62% of the girls made similar progress.

The independent consultant could substantiate the following statements through evidence:

- Overall the girls achieved higher levels of attainment than boys.
- Overall the boys made greater progress than the girls, which led to the closing of the differences in the levels of attainment.
- The children's comments indicated an overwhelming sense of achievement and enjoyment from the project activities.
- The children's comments indicated an appreciation of the development of their self-confidence as writers. This was gleaned from them having more ideas to choose from, as well as them feeling that they were able to use connectives and adjectives in an interesting way.

The independent consultant noted the strong partnership between the EAZ consultants, many headteachers of the participating schools, the literacy coordinator of these schools and class teachers. Some headteachers had taken an active involvement in the project. In some cases this had led to an active encouragement of risk taking.

One school's literacy coordinator described the project as, "The best thing they had done so far in the curriculum". The project had an influence on other topics taught within some of the schools. One school talked about how it had led to the rethinking and redesign of the following term's topic on Ancient Greece, and how they could link history and literacy in a creative way. Most teachers at the end of the project were able to talk about increased interest and imagination among the children. There were higher levels of motivation among the children; this was linked to increased opportunities for choice.

The literacy coordinator at one school gave an example of an innovative curricular project inspired by the materials. The project was based around a text entitled *A Caribbean Dozen*, edited by Michael Rosen. The children brought suitcases to school containing items they would need for a holiday in the Caribbean. The children then went on an imaginary holiday that culminated in a joint carnival with another school. This helped form an excellent link with parents, who became deeply engaged with their children.

It was decided the project had been such a success the aim was to continue with this approach next school year. New projects would be devised and materials produced for autumn term 2005 and spring term 2006. These materials would follow the same

principles as the original materials used in the EAZ project. The project thus formulated a blueprint for creative links, planning, curriculum mapping and the raising of standards in reading and writing. It was hoped to introduce further approaches into other year groups in particular into Key Stage 1. Reports were written both by the consultants and by the independent consultant around the findings of the project.

The teacher's comments also indicate the impact the project had on the development of children's writing, in particular children with learning difficulties.

An examination of the results of one particular school involved in the project as part of the EAZ illustrated the level of achievements in reading and writing across the year group. All the Year 5 children were in one class (a total of 26). Across the class a total national curriculum level rise of 16.33 was achieved in writing. This averaged out at 0.63 of a level per child. Twelve children in the year group progressed by a whole level or more in writing. Good progress was also made with reading. There was a total of a 14.66 rise in national curriculum levels overall. This averaged out at 0.56 per child. Eight children in the year group made a whole level or more progress in reading. All these assessments were taken over the school year as a whole.

The consultants appeared to have had a particular impact on the work of individual teachers and interviewing an NQT at one particular school highlighted this. This teacher was able to link other areas of the curriculum into the project. Other teachers in the school in other year groups showed an interest in her work and in the project. The school was without a headteacher but the teacher concerned now had the confidence to share her experiences and findings of the project with the new headteacher, when they took up the post. This teacher had also worked closely with the school's literacy coordinator.

Leicester NLC

The project achieved similar success in the main school in which my research was carried out. The project had led to much work on re-designing the curriculum, led by the headteacher. Curricular specialists were employed in drama and music. The network intended to carry out an evaluation of the project towards the end of the school year using a baseline oracy test, as well as analysis of statutory and non-statutory SATS. I attended a curricular sub-committee of the governing body with the headteacher, the focus of which was to see the materials in action in various classes across the school. Governors were allocated classes where they could see the project in action and were given a brief to inform their discussions with staff and in particular children. Guidance as to what to look for was given by the headteacher.

A positive report based on the findings was written and made available to all staff and to other governors. It highlighted the great enthusiasm shown by the children for the project but in particular the engagement of boys. It was also noted how confident children had become particularly in deploying speaking and listening skills. The project would be further evaluated through the Network's headteachers' group and the literacy coordinators' network. Findings were due to be reported at a lead learners' conference. A further outcome of the project was to see the extension of the materials to all year groups in the new school year. The project has led to one school developing a performing arts studio area. This will be used as a base to assist teaching, training and development across the network.

Alvaston Junior School, Derby

The project had worked well here also. The materials enhanced curriculum development, in particular with respect to dance. The headteacher had taken a lead

by engaging the Derby Dance Centre that motivated Year 6 boys who worked with a young male dance teacher on street dance. Year 2 spent two weeks off-curriculum preparing a performance and the project work and materials had given them confidence to use this flexibility of arrangement. The headteacher could already see positive developments in speaking and listening: this “had brought learning to life”.

The school’s leadership team was now in the middle of redesigning their curriculum map, involving the linking of subjects. The literacy coordinator had taken a particular lead with this. Shared year group planning was now taking place where this had not previously and the materials gave them an insight into how they might adapt their planning. The headteacher, literacy consultant and the rest of the leadership team supported all the teachers who required this in developing this way of working. The deputy headteacher stated, “this leadership team was always available to listen to teachers and to help them take onboard new ideas”. Children’s enthusiasm with literacy had improved greatly as had their speaking and listening skills. End-of-year assessments would be used to ascertain whether there had been any further improvements in attainment.

Conclusions

It was clear that leadership had played a key role in the development and sustainability of the project, and I saw different aspects of effective leadership in action, for example:

- the project being driven forwards by two consultants across an EAZ
- two headteachers working together to promote work across an NLC
- a headteacher working closely with the deputy headteacher and literacy coordinator.

Some common strands were noticeable across the three differing situations. These conditions when met meant the project had its greatest success, which led ultimately to a raising of standards in certain areas:

- The support of the headteachers and other members of the schools' leadership teams was critical. Where headteachers were not the driving force it was important they were kept informed and updated about the project. It was also important they were informed of any findings and evaluations. Headteachers and other leaders also had a key role to play in maintaining the sustainability of the project.
- Where much success had been achieved, other members of the schools' leadership teams had played a key role. This was particularly the case with literacy coordinators working across their schools.
- The project had also been successful where teachers were given confidence to use and experiment with the materials, to work with their colleagues in planning activities across the school and in particular year groups. Leadership from senior leaders played a crucial role in creating a climate where a certain amount of risk taking was encouraged.
- It was important that teachers were supported in developing any needs they had. Bespoke training of this nature led to success. The use of specialist teachers in the supporting of some curricular areas, particularly dance and music, also proved to be successful. All this played a significant part in ensuring teacher commitment that was vital to the success of the project.
- A high level of success was also achieved where leaders of the project had carefully planned evaluation. This worked well where an independent consultant was engaged for this purpose. The projects were evaluated in differing ways in the other situations. Effective evaluation saw the use of both qualitative and quantitative analysis of data:
 - quantitative data such as test results and levelled work samples showed how pupils had made progress in levels of attainment
 - pupil and teacher interviews showed how pupils' enjoyment and confidence had increased in areas such as speaking, listening and writing.
- Lastly, the research showed how differing forms of leadership had a significant impact on the strategic use of materials. This happened in such areas as engaging parents and governors, using the project as a vehicle for whole school curriculum mapping and involving the further linking of differing subject areas. Also, the planning of future use and development of approaches used in working with these materials; that is, using the principles and philosophy behind the materials to develop projects in other areas across the curriculum and school as a whole.

This was enhanced by schools meeting together on a regular basis, by sharing their success and planning ahead to work together in the future. Leadership was also to play a key role in linking this work with other whole school initiatives such as

involvement in the Primary Leadership Programme, the Excellence and Enjoyment agenda and any post- inspection issues. Teachers' and children's enthusiasm would need to be maintained for this to be successful as well as the need to address future training, resource and staffing issues.

Implications for others

Differing forms of leadership in the three case studies had a key impact on the success and sustainability of the project.

The following list outlines 10 implications for school leaders that may lie behind the success of any future projects of a similar nature.

1. Leaders can show through modelling, monitoring and dialogue that they value creativity and expect it to lie at the heart of all teaching and learning.
2. Teachers should be given the message from senior leaders that their innovation and experimentation are important factors in developing creativity as this develops confidence.
3. Collaboration within and between schools can bring success. Encouraging teachers to share experiences has significant potential to increase commitment and the potential for success.
4. Leaders should strive to create opportunities for pupils to work with external providers who promote creative opportunities.
5. Carefully planned evaluation is very important. The use of an independent consultant for this evaluation can be beneficial, providing objectivity and addressing school-based staff's time constraints.
6. Evaluation should be closely linked to sustainability and further development.
7. Leaders have a key role to play in identifying and celebrating success, particularly in rewarding pupils' creativity and involving parents and governors in celebrating success.
8. Aim to provide a stimulating environment. Make sure pupils have the resources and space to be creative. Create shared resources across schools.
9. Be creative in the management of curriculum time so that sustained periods of time can be devoted to particular pieces of work.
10. Encourage teachers and children to become their own researchers, for example using action research projects across and between schools.

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Appendix

In my own school, each year group studies a series of books that change on a termly basis. The aim is to teach around 50% of the literacy curriculum using these materials. Examples of how these books can promote work across the creative arts are provided. This is mainly in the areas of music, art, dance and drama. We have now connected other areas of the curriculum such as history, geography, science and design technology.

Examples of lesson plans and assessment are provided, although these are only to act as an aid towards teachers developing their own ideas. The teaching and learning materials are enriched by a wealth of materials and ideas. For example, a bank of ideas to develop teaching and learning activities in the creative arts, CDs containing appropriate music for dance and drama, and details of appropriate internet links for further development.

An Ofsted inspection in 2004 highlighted the developments and apparent impact that the implementation of these approaches was beginning to have. This was particularly the case with the development of speaking and listening skills:

... pupils often achieved well in lessons associated with the school's project that links literacy with the arts, subjects such as dance and drama. For example, pupils in Year Five study 'The Highwayman' poem and then acted out parts and created some dance movements to depict episodes from the story. The good learning that resulted from these opportunities enhanced pupils' abilities to speak clearly and confidently and deepened their understanding of the text. Pupils in every year group study a different text and have equally challenging and stimulating things to do. (p 9)

This radical approach to the arts highlights the importance given to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is central to the school's mission. (p 12)