

24 October 2006

Mrs S Holmes
Headteacher
Stowmarket Middle School
Walnut Tree Lane
Stowmarket
Suffolk
IP14 1JP

Dear Mrs Holmes

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 02 and 03 October 2006 to look at work in art, craft and design.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of 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 judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

Art, craft and design

The overall effectiveness of the subject was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

- Most pupils make the progress expected during Years 5 to 8 and are on course to reach a good level of achievement following their transfer to High School. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported effectively and achieve well. A small but significant proportion of current Year 5 pupils show very good skills, knowledge and understanding from the start; these provide a secure basis for this group of pupils to achieve more challenging targets.

- Attitudes towards the subject are very positive; pupils enjoy their art, craft and design lessons and value opportunities to work in a range of media that enables different individuals to succeed. Pupils listen carefully to the teacher and other pupils and manage resources with care and responsibility. Confidence developed through the subject is evident in the ideas and views expressed in sketchbooks and particularly through discussion.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning observed was good

- Individual lessons are well planned; objectives are clearly identified and attainable, time is used efficiently and different activities organised methodically. Pupils are managed in an assertive but inclusive style that establishes a good pace of learning for all. Discussion is managed effectively; questioning by the teacher is at best relentless in probing pupils' understanding and developing their thoughts and ideas. A range of different assessment approaches is used; these now require further refinement in order to make clearer the focus of different assessments and their contribution to the attainment target for the subject.
- Teachers make effective use of computer-aided resources to bring the world of art into the classroom although computers are not yet established as a resource to promote independent learning in the subject. However, the resources developed in school to fulfil particular objectives are highly effective. For example, the 'prompt cards' that pupils use to structure their questioning about different images and artefacts. In both key stages specialist art rooms contribute significantly to pupils' learning about self-organisation in a healthy, safe and stimulating environment.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum introduces pupils to a broad range of experiences in two-dimensional and three-dimensional media although the creative use of ICT remains at an early stage of development. The range of artists, craft makers and designers is focused on predominantly fine artists; this is reflected in pupils' narrow perceptions about the range of vocational opportunities related to the subject. However, other subjects are effectively used as a context, for example

imaginative illustrations created in response to 'Tom's Midnight Garden'.

- Long term planning is satisfactory although the contribution of particular units of work to pupils' progression in key areas of subject skills, knowledge and understanding is insufficiently clear; portfolio evidence is an area for further development. Visits to art galleries and work with practising artists are incorporated effectively when opportunities arise; these enrich particular aspects of the subject curriculum and are used to strengthen community links, for example a project with the local health centre.

Leadership and management

Subject leadership and management are good.

- The subject co-ordinator's enthusiasm for the subject inspires pupils and other teachers; there are many examples of leadership by example. The contribution of the subject to the ethos and effectiveness of the whole school is understood and evident in subject policies and practice although the connections between school and subject improvement planning could be more explicit.
- Good subject monitoring and evaluation is evident. Non-specialist teachers receive constructive feedback, if necessary matched with individually tailored or collective training. The subject leader has also made effective use of local authority training and support to inform subject self-evaluation within the school. For example, the use of data to track pupils has sharpened awareness of pupils' long term progress. However, information gathering about pupils' achievements in the subject in the primary schools is less effective.

Inclusion

The direct and thoughtfully targeted use of questioning already identified as a strong feature of teaching contributes to the inclusive quality of lessons. In particular, pupils with varying degrees of confidence are reassured that lessons provide opportunities to express ideas and feelings in a supportive atmosphere. Some projects, for example the 'peace' posters, show that pupils are able to use different art forms to communicate personal viewpoints although most pupils are more confident using discussion.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to provide a high level of challenge for the most able young artists by increasing expectations to revisit skills, knowledge and understanding, work on an ambitious scale, and pursue art related enquiry outside school
- to foster the expressive qualities of pupils' work by developing projects that encourage different pupils to communicate their often sophisticated views and ideas through art, craft and design
- to improve the coherence of assessment by identifying specific and regular assessment opportunities that directly link to objectives of the school and National Curriculum.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design at the school.

As I explained previously, 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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector