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Mrs T Mostowfi
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Dear Mrs Mostowfi

Ofsted Subjects & 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 18 and 19 September 2007 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 are published on the Ofsted website every half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interview with the subject co-ordinator, discussions with groups of pupils in Years 6 and 8, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupil's work in Key Stage 2 and 3, observation of four lessons and art club.

Art, craft and design

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

Achievement and standards

- Pupils start at the school with wide ranging experience and achievement in the subject; baseline assessment at the start of middle school indicates average standards on entry overall in the subject. Pupils of all abilities respond well to the specialist teaching and resources making very good progress through Years 5 to 8. Scrutiny of work achieved by past Year 8 pupils show that they are well prepared to reach or exceed national expectations when they transfer to upper school.

- Boys and girls develop very good skills in relation to 'exploring and developing ideas' and 'investigating and making' strands of the National Curriculum. Their knowledge and understanding about artists, craftworkers and designers is satisfactory but constrained by little engagement with galleries or contemporary artists out of school. This also limits their understanding about how the subject contributes to future economic and personal well-being through the application of skills in creative and cultural contexts. However, the visit by the previous Year 8 to Tate Modern deepened pupils' understanding about abstract concepts explored in school.
- Work in two-dimensions is confident due to regular development of drawing, painting, collage and printmaking skills. Particular strengths are intelligent use of colour, imaginative composition and skilful development of shape and pattern into abstract images. Pupils are also able to handle three-dimensional media and ICT with care and creativity but there is less evidence of how these qualities and their observation skills improve over time.
- The personal development of pupils in the subject is good. They enjoy the subject and a high proportion of pupils choose to continue their work independently in art clubs. Sketchbooks show that pupils are able to use a comprehensive range of research skills relevant to their wider learning. They also demonstrate very responsible attitudes to assessing their own work and that of others. However, the subject leader has accurately identified the need for pupils to 'revisit' work as a way of transforming good achievement into outstanding. Where projects challenge pupils to express personal feelings some reflect deeply and make effective use of visual communication to express emotions.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in the subject are good.

- Lessons are very well planned and prepared. The distinctive features of the subject are emphasised clearly through lesson objectives and informative, confident teacher demonstration. Illustrations of different ideas and approaches used by other artists, including other pupils, are used effectively to inspire problem-solving. Knowledge of individual pupils is used effectively to target questions and support. However, the starting points for lessons remain similar for different abilities and could be more varied in order to contribute to the whole school drive to increase challenge through differentiation.
- The learning environment is very well managed to promote pupils' independence. In the best lessons the teacher observes pupils skilfully and intervenes strategically. A strength of the teaching is the involvement of pupils in peer assessment which contributes to the equal value given to other peoples' art, whether made by famous artists or other pupils. This effective approach could go even further by involving pupils in demonstrating, curating exhibitions and mentoring. Good quality displays in the art studio and public

areas of the school contribute to pupils' awareness that different ideas are encouraged and high standards are expected.

Quality of curriculum

The art, craft and design curriculum is good.

- Pupils enjoy a good range of opportunities that have improved as a result of a continuous programme of work with the subject specialist; this effectively promotes continuity and progression. Some of the most effective work combines different approaches and challenges pupils to use mixed-media. A wide range of themes enable pupils to explore the natural and built environment, human form and feelings through different media and artists. The school contributes to Ampthill Arts Festival and units of work inspired by the locality are integrated. However, the profile could be heightened to strengthen pupils' awareness of local culture and how it compares and contrasts with others.
- Lessons are enhanced by different initiatives and events in school that include regular clubs provided by the subject leader. The pupils are able to make connections with other areas of the curriculum for example through their experience of literacy or critical thinking within art but links could be more explicit in order to strengthen pupils' understanding about the relevance of skills, knowledge and understanding taught. There is insufficient engagement with original art, craft and design early on in the course to show pupils and parents how to use first hand experiences to enrich their work at school. Nevertheless, the subject leader uses the work of other pupils very effectively, including past pupils, as examples of creative diversity.

Leadership and management of art, craft and design

Leadership and management are good.

- Subject self-evaluation is accurate, clearly matched to improvement priorities and well informed by links with other schools and subject specialists. Liaison with local schools is well structured and promotes continuity for the pupils; the middle/upper school interface is effective both in tracking pupils' progress in the subject and in contributing to evidence about their creative and cultural development generally. Professional development managed by the local authority involving an AST based in a school with specialist visual arts status contributes to a mutually critical but supportive approach to subject improvement. Nevertheless, the subject leader has accurately identified the need to increase moderation of standards across schools.
- The needs, interests and responses of different pupils are carefully analysed and the curriculum is frequently reviewed and modified by taking account of pupils' views. The range of consultation could be widened to involve creative practitioners and industries but involvement in the Ampthill Arts Festival and school exhibitions open to the public are productive in raising awareness about pupils' achievements in the subject. Data is used systematically to track pupils' overall performance in relation to different projects but is less effective

in identifying consistent strengths and weaknesses in skills, knowledge and understanding in the subject or that link with others. Nevertheless, the continuous review and modification of pupil peer and self-assessment is a good example of subject leadership focused on accelerating the progress of pupils.

Inclusion

Boys and girls with differing abilities progress at a good pace due to the clarity of teachers' expectations and support, and strong sense of collaboration between pupils. Nevertheless, differentiation is more evident during the progress of lessons than through different starting points for pupils of different abilities. Additional challenge for gifted and talented pupils is provided but art clubs are popular with a wide ability range and enrichment such as the visit by previous pupils to Tate Modern an entitlement for all. Overall girls' achievement is higher than boys but the gap is narrower than the national picture and a similar proportion achieve outstanding work.

Subject issue: The impact of assessment on pupils' progress and creativity

Teachers' feedback in lessons and through project assessments provides a clear indication to pupils about how to improve and develop their ideas and skills. This is enhanced by pupil self-assessment and peer assessment. Pupil interviews included a clear definition of creativity by one pupil who expressed the view that 'thinking or making something unique' is required. However, this is generally a criterion for assessment that could be more regularly discussed alongside technical skills. Assessment is an integral feature of teaching and learning in the subject and this a quality of provision that leads to good quality outcomes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to increase pupils' first hand experience of the work of artists, craftworkers and designers to inform how and why they revisit their own work
- to develop the use of three-dimensional and digital media to enable boys and girls to specialise as they progress onto examination courses
- to use evidence of pupils' experiences and creative achievements before starting middle school to expand the range of starting points.

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