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Ms S Marchant
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Dear Ms Marchant

Ofsted survey inspection programme – art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 October 2007 to look at work in art and design with a focus on the quality of assessment in the subject and its impact on pupils' progress and creativity.

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 the judgements made included: interviews with staff, discussions with pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, and observation of five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in the subject are satisfactory.

- On entry, pupils' creative skills are wide ranging. Some are at the expected level for their age; very few are above. They make satisfactory progress in art and design over time to reach average standards of attainment by the time they leave the school.
- In the foundation stage, an extensive range of creative activities are on offer to promote pupils' creative development both in the classroom and outside. These are sensitively led by adults who teach the pupils new skills, help them to make choices and encourage them to express their ideas imaginatively. Thorough assessment ensures that learning builds securely on what the pupils already know and can do.

Consequently, good proportions of pupils reach or exceed the early learning goals by the end of Reception.

- Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the work of artists, designers and craftworkers from different times, cultures and countries is at an early stage of development. However, effective links with Creative Partnerships has provided valuable opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively alongside living artists and sculptors creating impressive 3D work on a large scale.
- The subject leader is trialling new ways for pupils to use sketchbooks. Initial prototypes are promising enabling pupils to build a repertoire of techniques to refer to in future work.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in the subject are satisfactory.

- The quality of art and design teaching is variable across the school but satisfactory overall. The most effective teaching takes account of pupils' prior learning and provides them with a variety of stimulating activities to challenge creative thinking. This is evident in the diversity of their finished work and the pupils' observable pleasure in undertaking it. However their progress, creativity and enjoyment of art and design lessons is constrained when learning objectives are insufficiently clear, learners too passive, or the planned learning activity insufficiently challenging to capture their interest.
- Teachers use opportunities to develop pupils' art and design skills in the context of other subjects effectively. Teaching is often responsive to local influences. However, weaknesses in assessment in art and design leave some teachers unsure about how to build on pupils' prior learning. Consequently, next steps are not always planned well enough to match the needs and abilities of all learners. When there is insufficient balance between listening, looking and doing some pupils become restless and lose interest.
- A trained art specialist regularly supports pupils in class. Pupils identified as being particularly creative, benefit from her lunch time art club where they learn to revisit, refine and develop ideas in mixed-media using existing skills in new contexts.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum enables teachers and learners to adequately meet the objectives of the foundation stage and the national curriculum.
- In the foundation stage, pupils express and communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings through designing and making, movement, music making and imaginative play. They are introduced to an ever widening range of materials and tools to explore and master.
- The school's scheme of work is under revision to ensure that new skills and techniques are introduced more systematically in order to promote progression more effectively.

- Pupils use computer software and digital photography confidently in art and design activities from an early age.
- Visiting artists and subject specialists and regular gallery visits are strong features in the curriculum providing pupils with wide experience in the subject.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management in the subject are satisfactory.

- The subject leader has good subject knowledge and a passion for creativity. New to a senior role in leading and developing creativity across subjects, she has successfully undertaken an audit of art and design, pinpointed some areas of weakness and identified the means to address them.
- Links with the local comprehensive school and the involvement of parents in the subject are underdeveloped.
- The subject leader is aware that monitoring and quality assurance activities need to be improved in order to develop an accurate evaluation of the school's performance in the subject.

Subject issue: the impact of assessment on the progress and creativity of learners

- Assessment in the foundation stage is regular, rigorous and accurate. However, this is not continued in the subject; end of year reporting provides the only consistent assessment of pupils' achievements in art and design. Teachers' comments in end of year reports focus mainly on pupils' attitudes and a brief description of activities undertaken during the year. There is insufficient emphasis on pupils' progress and creativity. The subject leader is aware of weaknesses in subject assessment and has secure plans in place to provide guidance for staff and add to the existing portfolio and profiles through accurate levelling and moderation of standards.

Inclusion

- The school has achieved a gold award from the local authority for outstanding practice in inclusion.
- In art and design, the curriculum reflects differences in the cultural and religious backgrounds of pupils. For example, a topic on Pakistan and India provides pupils with good opportunities to study Asian art.
- Boys and girls speak favourably about the subject and work with an equal level of enthusiasm in lessons.
- Gifted and talented pupils are identified through analysis of assessment information but this is underused in lesson planning with too much reliance on differentiation by outcome.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or significant disabilities are well supported by teaching assistants. Adaptation of activities to meet their needs enables them to have full access to the curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in the subject
- develop the use of sketchbooks to promote continuity in drawing from direct observation and to practise techniques
- improve pupils' knowledge and understanding of the work of artists, designers and craftworkers from different times, countries, cultures
- improve assessment in the subject in order to develop more accurate, consistent and frequent tracking of pupils' performance.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your Local Authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Linda Killman
Her Majesty's Inspector