

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr S Hallahan
Headteacher
English Martyrs Catholic Primary School
High Street
Hillmorton
Rugby
Warwickshire
CV21 4EE

Dear Mr Hallahan

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 June 2008 to look at work in art and design.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of assessment 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 the 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 and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and short observations of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of art and design was judged to be satisfactory with some good features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- On entry, pupils' creative skills generally meet expectations for their age and their creativity develops well during their Reception year. They are encouraged to use all of their senses as they play. This adds intensity to their experiences making them meaningful and memorable as well as enabling them to work confidently. For example, the children listen to rippling music visualising water and colours whilst making

finger movements to describe what they see. Then they look at examples of Monet's work before painting their own colour patches. The children choose from a rich variety of activities designed to develop their creativity and personal skills in interesting play spaces indoors and outside.

- Through Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils make the expected progress in the subject and reach targets typical of their age, ability and context. They make appropriate use of materials, techniques and processes to communicate their ideas.
- Pupils' knowledge and understanding of painters is satisfactory but they have limited understanding of sculptors, designers and craftspeople especially those who are contemporary.
- From Year 1 the pupils develop a good understanding of visual elements and how they can be used to enhance their work. Nonetheless, their skills do not always progress as well as they should because teachers do not yet have a secure enough understanding of what progression looks like. This is evident in the work seen in pupils' sketchbooks and in displays of work around the school. Generally sketchbooks are not used well enough for pupils to create a personal repertoire of ideas, feelings and thoughts.
- There is plentiful opportunity for pupils to work collaboratively and pupils use them well to develop valuable personal skills and creative behaviours to benefit them in lifelong learning.
- The subject supports their spiritual development very effectively where the school's strong Catholic ethos shines through. One pupil in Year 2 for example, describes the experience of sketching inside the local church as 'calm and relaxing'; another says, 'Inside myself I feel very gentle and calm'. Around the school are poignant quotes directly related to the subject for pupils to reflect upon.
- Girls enjoy the subject and take a full part in lessons although the school's assessment system shows that girls outperform the boys. During the inspection, however, no significant differences were apparent in lessons seen.

Quality of teaching and learning of art and design

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Lessons are efficiently organised and well resourced.
- Teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively. In all lessons seen, pupils' behaviour is good and they use tools and materials carefully. Generally, activities tend to be directed rather than the teacher adopting a role of observation and intervention to support individual pupils' progress.
- Teachers plan pupils' work carefully according to specific objectives taking pupils' varying needs and abilities fully into account. However, planned activities tend to have a particular outcome in mind and as a result, opportunities for pupils to discover, experiment, take risks and develop more autonomy in their learning are limited.
- The school's chosen scheme of work ensures that pupils learn all that they should.

- Opportunities for teachers to moderate pupils' work to see progression are rare. Consequently, teachers are not always able to guide pupils effectively in how they can improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum enables teachers and learners to meet the objectives of the Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum.
- Space inside the building is very limited and constrains opportunities for 'big art' activities and 3-dimensional work. The school compensates for this to some extent using their inviting outdoor spaces in fine weather.
- Curriculum planning makes good links with other subjects especially in history, English and religious education enabling pupils' to regularly use their art and design skills and deepen their understanding. For example in Year 5, groups of pupils explore the characteristics of Tudor buildings creating collages from natural and manufactured materials.
- Pupils are given a range of opportunities to use computer software to explore colour and pattern and regularly use the internet to research artists' work.
- Visits to local galleries and museums are planned into the curriculum to extend pupils' experiences in the subject.
- Arts Week is a whole school event much enjoyed by staff and pupils alike. A visiting artist works alongside the pupils enabling them to benefit from their specialist knowledge. This annual event provides a level of choice, experimentation and creativity that is not always replicated in lessons.

Leadership and management of art and design

Leadership and management in art and design are satisfactory.

- The interim subject leader has good organisational skills and uses them expertly to systematically monitor and evaluate the subject's effectiveness across key stages. Nonetheless, opportunities to observe the quality of teaching are few.
- Displays of art work around the school are plentiful and eye catching. You take a keen interest in monitoring the work and provide regular feedback to staff on the quality and visual impact of displays. As a result, displays are fresh, well mounted and enhance the aesthetic quality of the school's interior.
- In the past, leadership in the subject has been hampered by a lack of subject expertise. The interim subject leader is working closely with a new subject leader who, as a trained art and design specialist, has the necessary level of subject knowledge to enable the subject to flourish. Handover has been well managed ensuring that the incoming leader has insight into strengths and weaknesses in the subject drawn from insightful self-evaluation that is reported to governors. This contributes to the school's good capacity to further improve outcomes for learners.

- Professional relationships with other educational settings and local artists, craftworkers and designers are underdeveloped.
- Resources to support teachers in their planning are helpful and accessible but professional training to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding has been limited.

Subject issue: the quality of assessment and its impact on pupils' progress and creativity. This is satisfactory and developing well.

- In the Foundation Stage assessment is used effectively to inform daily planning so that pupils' learning builds on what they know and can do.
- Teachers assess pupils' attainment regularly and the school's focus on pupils' assessing their own work is developing well. Pupils are beginning to evaluate their own work. Nonetheless, pupils are not always given clear criteria to measure their success against.
- Pupils' performance in each unit of the scheme of work is evaluated to highlight their achievement and to adapt future curriculum planning.
- Explicitness of assessment criteria is less advanced and not yet fully embedded in assessment practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve teachers' understanding of progression
- achieve greater balance between teachers' objective led planning and pupils' creativity
- develop pupils' use of sketchbooks.

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

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