

20 June 2008

Ms J Edginton
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Dear Ms Edginton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 20 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of art and design was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Learning to look closely, ask questions and record with care and delight begins as soon as pupils start school. In the Foundation Stage pupils achieve or exceed the Early Learning Goals in creative development. They are confident, happy individuals who freely and imaginatively explore the scope of materials through play to create original pieces of art and design work. Extensive opportunities for imaginative play contribute to the high level of enjoyment the pupils show in learning.

- Pupils are given as much time as they need to look, discuss and ask pertinent questions about what they see before recording their response to the experience. They are focussed, thoughtful learners; well rehearsed in refining their ideas. As a result, they make good progress in most elements and exemplary progress in drawing and mixed-media work.
- Standards of attainment are well above average in most respects and compare very well with those attained by pupils in similar schools.
- The pupils have excellent attitudes towards the subject. High quality teaching contributes to this as well as pupils' extensive involvement in collaborative work for exhibitions, competitions and projects that focus on creativity in learning.
- The pupils talk about their accomplishments with pride. They appreciate seeing their work tastefully displayed around the building and say that they enjoy opportunities to show their work to others in celebration assemblies.
- All pupils treat equipment, resources and artefacts with great respect and care. For example, pupils are trusted to carefully handle and explore stimulating collections of natural and manufactured objects strategically placed in interesting nooks and crannies throughout the school.
- The subject makes a major contribution in developing creative qualities such as perseverance, personal initiative and risk-taking that equip pupils with valuable qualities to draw upon in their future lives.

Quality of teaching and learning of art and design

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teaching is at least good in all respects and exemplary in some.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge that lends confidence to their teaching styles. They act as catalysts for learning, become personally involved in the process and work alongside pupils offering sensitive and timely support.
- Pupils' work is gathered painstakingly throughout the year and annotated for future reference. The information is used to evaluate pupils' attainment and progress in each of the strands of the National Curriculum. Assessments relate to attainment targets at the end of each key stage. This system provides staff with an excellent overview of how well pupils are progressing to inform future curriculum planning.
- Pupils store completed work and digital images in individual portfolios to refer to. However, they do not use sketchbooks to build collections of techniques to refer to or as a record of the personal journey they have taken over time.
- Staff and pupils use computers and other technology extensively in their work. For example, computerised microscopes enable detailed examination of the structure of forms.
- Relationships are strong and pupils work harmoniously with sustained concentration.

- Teaching assistants and volunteers are well directed to support learning.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- The curriculum provides excellent balance of planned opportunities for developing pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding and serendipity to provide unprompted moments of discovery and challenge. For example, during School Grounds Week, a Year 6 pupil's question about how to capture the swaying movement of leaves prompted an in-depth exploration of impressionist art.
- The pupils enjoy and achieve in relation to curriculum requirements in the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2. In addition, the school is successful in interpreting and adapting the curriculum to capitalise on local resources and individual needs and interests. The scheme of work is not considered a constraint.
- New minority ethnic arrivals who speak no English benefit from the curriculum's strong visual dimension that enables their full participation in lessons.
- The school has a remarkable record of success in pupils' involvement in art events and competitions. They have achieved numerous awards and their work has been exhibited widely. For example, they created a metre of embroidery to contribute to the Golden Tapestry for the 2005 Commonwealth Games that was exhibited locally and abroad.
- The after school club adds to pupils experiences in the subject where they explore new techniques.
- A richness flows from visits, visitors and memorable experiences such as pupils' participation in National Art Day.

Leadership and management of art and design

Leadership and management in art and design are outstanding.

- The high profile that the subject has in the school is underpinned by your visionary leadership combined with the subject leader's efficient management. As a result, staff work with a common sense of purpose and morale is high.
- Teachers with subject specialist skills, sensitively support non-specialists developing their confidence and expertise in teaching the subject. This is a key factor in how the school achieves consistency in the very good quality of teaching and learning.
- Quality assurance activities are thorough and an ongoing dialogue is generated amongst staff held through which you communicate your high expectations. The inclusion and achievement of all learners is a central goal promoted through relentless drive for first-class provision incorporating a profound fun factor for learners. As a result, Water Mill pupils flourish and develop a strong sense fulfilment through their work.
- Governors' generous funding for the subject ensures that good quality resources are plentiful and tempting.

Subject issue: the quality of assessment and its impact on pupils' progress and creativity

This is good.

- 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 using annotated work gathered over time as an evidence base. Their performance is assessed in relation to the levels of the national curriculum attainment targets for art and design. As a result, teachers know precisely what strengths their pupils have in the subject and how to help them to improve. Nonetheless, the quality of teachers' comments is variable.
- Pupils are encouraged to describe how they feel about their work although some do not use subject specific vocabulary as well as they should in their evaluations.
- Pupils' performance in each unit of the scheme of work is evaluated to highlight their achievement and to adapt future curriculum planning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- Introducing pupils to working with sketchbooks
- Improve pupils' use of subject related vocabulary.

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