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Ms A Brewer
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Brewer

Ofsted subject survey: identifying good practice in art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 09 July 2008 to look at the impact of work with visiting artists and local arts organisations on pupils' learning in the subject.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements refers mainly to work in collaboration with organisations such as the Bow Arts Trust by pupils working in school and off-site with artists. Evidence was gathered through discussions with you, the subject leader, other staff and groups of pupils as well as analysis of pupils' work.

Features of good practice observed

- The extensive range of work carried out by pupils with creative practitioners in various disciplines contributes strongly to their enjoyment of learning, to the breadth of their experiences and to their self esteem.
- Completed work has a very beneficial impact on the school environment through displays and site specific pieces such as the garden area.
- Through working with visual artists the pupils gain practical making skills and a better understanding of the process that artists go through when developing their ideas, for example in using sketchbooks and gathering research. However there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply what they learn in subsequent art work or elsewhere in the curriculum.

- The pupils learn to respond to topical themes through working alongside artists who are themselves taking contemporary issues such as environmental awareness as their starting points. They learn that one of the roles played by artists is to reflect on the world around them.
- The pupils gain good critical skills in analysing the work of artists in order to see what messages are contained through having first hand access to the people who make it.
- The projects offer good opportunities to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills and the school is rightly looking to reinforce wider literacy and numeracy learning through art and design.
- Teaching and learning at the school is enriched by the addition of "new faces" in the words of the pupils. The artists are respected by the pupils as custodians of specialist expertise, producing high quality work for the public domain. This encourages the pupils to aim high themselves.
- Staff gain valuable skills through working alongside artists and through training provided for each project. These skills are not always shared well enough with other colleagues to maximise their subsequent impact.
- The different roles played by school staff and artists are well defined and the artists are carefully selected, having good communication skills.
- The artists often embody experimental approaches where, within parameters, the unexpected is built upon and exploited, helping the students to develop the ability to take creative risks.
- The artists' expectations are high and the staff note the value to pupils of working with people who have no preconceptions of them and that this enables some pupils to exceed what they are normally capable of.
- The projects undertaken make a positive impact on pupils' skills in working as a team and, in some cases, on their leadership capabilities.
- Strong commitment from the headteacher and other leaders including the subject coordinator is crucial in enabling the extensive range of work with artists to be undertaken.
- Considerable expertise has been built up in the school about where and how to raise funds and in how to deal with artists and organisations such as the Bow Arts Trust. Good long term relationships with such organisations are pivotal to gaining access to appropriate artists. The evidence indicates that the Trust has a good understanding of the educational context within which this work takes place and helps schools select artists who are suitable for the work undertaken.
- In planning work with artists, appropriate emphasis is placed on the needs of the pupils in relation to the curriculum and to the wider context of the school and its community. This is communicated well to the artists through planning ahead of and during each project.
- Projects have clear learning intentions and the evaluation of each is good. However the outcomes of each evaluation are not drawn together to assess the overall progress towards the school's aims for pupils' creative development and to identify areas where adjustments are required.

Areas for development

Alongside highlighting the strengths above, the visit also identified the following areas for improvement which we discussed:

- give the pupils more opportunities to apply and thereby reinforce what they learn through these projects in their subsequent activities
- ensure staff share the skills and knowledge they gain so as to make the greatest impact in the long term
- evaluate the overall effect of all the work with artists on the pupils' creative development to identify if the aims are being met and to inform the planning of future projects.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the gallery in school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector