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Dear Mr Knights

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 May 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 two lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are inadequate.

- The very small size of each cohort (sometimes only two pupils) leads to wide variation in the starting points for five-year-olds year on year. However, their creative development usually matches national expectations. In Reception most make steady progress and are working securely within the early learning goals by the end of the year.

- In the Foundation/Key Stage 1 class, skills are taught satisfactorily so that pupils learn to use tools and manipulate media confidently. However, adult over-direction limits pupils' ability to make their own choices, work out problems for themselves and learn from their mistakes. This constrains their creativity and reduces the development of important personal skills through creative play as most of their talk is channelled through the adults. Space inside the building is very limited for imaginative play, building, dance and making art on a large scale. Pupils have regular access to play space outside but its use as a potentially challenging environment to support and extend pupils' creative development is not exploited.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2 learn to draw, paint, print, make collage and artefacts but skills are not taught progressively through a robust scheme of work neither is their work regularly assessed. As a result, teachers have no systems to measure pupils' progress to ensure that they are achieving all that they should.
- The pupils use sketchbooks occasionally as a place to make quick jottings that lack quality and thoughtful consideration. They are underdeveloped as a place to explore, develop and refine ideas, or to make collections of techniques to refer to and revisit in future work.
- In all lessons seen, pupils behave well and use tools and materials carefully. They enjoy art and design activities particularly when they work on special project weeks. For example, the oldest pupils work with visible pleasure creating models of primitive shelters using natural and manufactured materials as a starting point to inspire imaginative writing.
- Pupils' understanding and knowledge of the work of artists, designers and craftworkers from different times, cultures and countries is too limited.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities as well as the most able are not having their experiences in the subject tailored to their needs and abilities.
- Boys and girls enjoy the subject and take a full part in lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning of art and design

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate.

- Lessons are efficiently organised and resourced reasonably well. Digital images are used effectively by teachers to provoke thought and stimulate ideas. However, pupils rarely use technology to support their learning in the subject.
- Teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively ensuring that they work safely and use the time productively. Support staff are deployed satisfactorily to support pupils' learning.
- There is insufficient balance between adult-led learning and child initiated activity.
- There is a lack of rigour and consistency in planning to ensure adequate coverage of the National Curriculum through an identified scheme of work.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is inadequate.

- There is no over-arching curriculum plan in place to ensure pupils full access to the National Curriculum requirements. Nonetheless, pupils do spend sufficient time on the subject every week.
- Links with other subjects are developing particularly in English and history. For example, in Class 3 pupils have explored the work of William Morris through their history study of the Victorians.
- Art club is well attended and adds to pupils' enjoyment, offering tasters of new techniques, media and tools.
- Pupils have visited exhibitions of students' work in the local secondary school to extend and broaden their experience in the subject. Other enrichment activities such as visits to galleries or opportunities to work alongside living artists are rare.
- Pupils' art work is exhibited to a satisfactory standard and pupils are proud to see their work on display.
- The school makes insufficient use of the local environment for pupils to draw on location.

Leadership and management of art and design

Leadership and management in art and design are inadequate.

- The school recognises that there are significant inconsistencies in practice across the school and is taking urgent action to address this.
- Subject leadership has very recently changed hands following a period of instability. Two teachers and a talented teaching assistant all with specialist art skills to offer have taken on the role with commitment, enthusiasm and passion. They have a clear vision for the subject's future development based on an audit of provision. They know the steps they need to take to secure improvement and to raise the subject's profile but it is too soon for this to have had discernable impact on pupils' achievement.
- The subject has not been monitored, evaluated or reviewed for too long. Consequently, teaching lacks precision and training to support development of their subject knowledge is not in place.
- The introduction of a robust scheme of work and the development of assessment systems has rightly been identified as priorities for improvement in order to raise standards.

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

This is inadequate.

- Assessment systems are not in place. Informal teacher assessments are based on their observations of pupils at work and do not relate to National Curriculum levels or an understanding of skills progression across disciplines. As a result, there is a lack of clarity in how to support pupils and move their learning on.

- In the Foundation Stage there is not enough scope for pupils to experiment or explore the potential of materials and media. This has an impact on their creativity.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- embed the school's chosen published scheme of work in curriculum planning across the school to ensure full coverage of the National Curriculum programme of study
- devise systematic procedures for assessing and levelling pupils' work against the National Curriculum attainment targets
- develop consistency in the use of sketchbooks
- make effective use of the school grounds to provide more opportunities for developing pupils' creative skills in Reception and for all pupils to experience drawing on location, working on a large scale and to use 3D media.

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