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Dear Mrs Black

Ofsted Subjects & Survey Inspection Programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 26 and 27 March 2008 to look at work in art, craft and design.

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 are published on the Ofsted website every half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interview with you and the subject leader, discussions with groups of pupils in Years 5 to 8, scrutiny of relevant documentation, observation of lessons, analysis of portfolios in Key Stage 2 and 3, scrutiny of resources and work stored digitally.

Art and design

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

Achievement and standards

- Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 5 and 6 to reach average standards at the end of Key Stage 2. Good progress in Years 7 and 8 leads to good quality work in 2 and 3 dimensions.
- School tracking of pupil achievement indicates that a good proportion of pupils continue onto GCSE courses in the subject at High school and succeed in achieving A*-C grades.

- The most effective work is supported by pupils' research. For example, in Year 7 their investigation into Cubism and Picasso's work prepared pupils to interpret their self-image creatively with the use of computer software.
- Pupils know about a limited range of artists but show insufficient understanding about how to make different connections to their own work.
- High standards are achieved when pupils are driven by a particular purpose and when they are able to extend their skills by using more sophisticated equipment. For example, the 'Staying Safe' poster designed for North Tyneside created at the City Learning Centre by gifted and talented pupils.
- Boys in particular develop the confidence to combine experimentation with observation. For example, in Year 8 flower studies inspired by the work of Georgia O'Keefe are bold, exciting images due to their skill in mark making with improvised palette knives.
- Pupils work at a generally good pace, but some groups are competitive, accelerating progress due to their ability to evaluate qualities in others' work and review their own work critically in order to develop it.
- The personal development and well-being of pupils in the subject is good. Boys and girls with different abilities enjoy art lessons and a good proportion, particularly girls, support extra-curricular opportunities. Pupils show pride in their work and show curiosity in work displayed around the school and on the learning portal.
- Where projects expect pupils to collect materials or prepare ideas they respond conscientiously. For example, the 'bric-a-brac' sculptures. Pupils interviewed expressed interest in more guidance about suitable activities to pursue as homework.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in the subject are good.

- Information communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to stimulate pupils' interest, particularly where different visual images are used together to promote comparison and contrast. For example, two different 'winter landscapes' projected in one lesson observed provided a clear message to pupils that there were different ways of responding to the same stimulus. Pupils were engaged quickly in 'deconstructing' one of the images through the teachers' appropriate use of the interactive whiteboard.
- Teaching uses good knowledge about individual pupils to encourage pupils' participation and target individual support. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are sensitively supported to achieve objectives for themselves. The work of pupils with average ability indicates that their ideas and achievements are sometimes worthy of further development. A suitable level of challenge is set for gifted and talented pupils.
- The national strategies are deployed effectively in the subject. For example 'welcome tasks' involve pupils quickly in taking responsibility for organising resources or thoughts. Learning outcomes are expressed by the teacher using language understandable to pupils and are sufficiently open-ended not to constrain the creativity of pupils' responses.

Quality of curriculum

The art, craft and design curriculum is good.

- There are productive curriculum links with local First and High schools. For example, the 'Whitely Bay Art Collaborative' has worked effectively together to share different approaches to the subject through an exhibition in five public venues to the theme of 'Sea Fever'. Visits to High Schools following transfer also contributes to informed planning about the curriculum.
- Links with local art galleries are well established. For example, all pupils visit the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle as part of the entitlement curriculum and the Woodhorn Colliery is visited as a stimulus for work across the curriculum, including art and design. However, there is further potential to emphasise the relevance of the curriculum by connecting it to more local artists, craftworkers and designers or the local landscape.
- Curriculum experiences integrated with other subjects are used effectively to promote the development of pupils' transferable skills. For example, a visit to Belsay Hall with English developed pupils' creative and communication skills across both subjects. Preparation for the new secondary curriculum in Key Stage 3 is well informed.

Leadership and management of art and design

Leadership and management are good.

- The subject leader is knowledgeable but self-critical. Professional development is used judiciously to develop specific areas of expertise that enable the single subject teacher to meet the needs and interests of different pupils. For example, animation is a popular unit of work introduced following specific training.
- The subject is monitored and evaluated regularly. The whole school approach provides a sharp focus on the learner. Observations are systematically recorded. The school is moving towards more judgemental criteria in order to use monitoring and evaluation to prioritise issues for action.
- The North Tyneside Education portal is very well used as an opportunity to inform and involve parents in the subject. The gallery of pupils' work provides evidence of their achievement and is being developed further to share curriculum planning and extension tasks. The background information displayed alongside work in school and on the plasma screens in public areas, are good examples of clear communication to other teachers, parents and pupils. Information about different careers in the creative industries is an area for development.
- The subject leader expresses clear understanding about the contribution of the subject to the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes. Documentation is adequate but given the cross-curricular initiatives developing the guidance that defines a 'ladder of progression' in the subject would benefit from additional detail, particularly related to critical and creative skills.

Inclusion

- The effective integration of pupils from wide ranging backgrounds, abilities or who join the school in Year 7, or through 'managed moves' contribute to a picture of inclusive practice. In addition, a pupil with physical disabilities from a nearby Special school is able to participate in art and design lessons due to good adaptability to individual need.
- Boys' achievement compares particularly well with the national picture. Opportunities to apply imagination, use 3D and digital media and respond to timed activities, motivate boys at the school.

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

- Pupils' work is regularly assessed and their progress tracked. The subject leader demonstrates a good understanding about pupils' performance in relation to different strands of the national curriculum.
- The subject area is leading on an innovative approach to assessment through 'degrees of pupil engagement'. This is proving effective in distinguishing between different indicators of pupils' achievement and personal development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop the role of sketchbooks in the subject and across the curriculum
- deepen pupils' understanding of art, craft and design, particularly from the contemporary world and locality
- pursue work with individual pupils where their responses indicate that further potential exists.

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

As I explained previously, 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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector