

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



17 October 2008

Mr G Metcalfe
Acting Headteacher
Abbots Langley School
Parsonage Close
Abbots Langley
Hertfordshire
WD5 0BQ

Dear Mr Metcalfe

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 16 October 2008 to evaluate your work in art and design.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit also evaluated how effectively the school used the work of different, artists, craftworkers and designers to promote the pupils' 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: guided visit to all classrooms to discuss displays with individual teachers, analysis of additional work in the school portfolio, interviews with you, the subject leader and groups of pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and observations of lessons in the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and 2.

The overall effectiveness of art and design was judged good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Pupils make good progress in art and design. The work on display, in the school portfolio and in lessons indicates that pupils achieve good standards in a range of art media during their time at the school.
- Particularly creative work is achieved when the children respond to opportunities to work on a large scale. For example, brush roller and splatter paintings created in the nursery and free weavings by Year 3

pupils through found structures such as bed springs, are confident.

There is less evidence of these qualities in the work of Years 5 and 6.

- The quality of pupils' mark-making in a range of two-dimensional and digital media is good in all years. Work is particularly effective when pupils apply their mark-making skills to direct observation. For example the intricate interpretations of leaves created in Year 4.
- Pupils enjoy using colour from the start. They are able to make colours thoughtfully in Reception by building on their exploration of colour in the nursery. In Key Stage 1 pupils mix and match colour well to make self-portraits and in Key Stage 2 use colour symbolism to add impact, for example to their work linked to RE, inspired by stained glass.
- Pupils show good awareness about how to use the stimulus of other artists to develop their own use of materials, including digital media. For example, their interpretation of Wassily Kandinsky in Year 2, John Brunson in Year 4 and Friedensreich Hundertwasser in Year 5.
- Collaboration is handled effectively by the pupils, particularly when working on group projects, comparing ideas or evaluating the work of other artists. Pupils are reflective about the subject, evident in discussion about the distinction between the work of artists, designers and craftspeople and the role and purpose of sketchbooks.
- The independence of pupils is impressive in selecting and managing tools and equipment. In Key Stage 1 these qualities are also apparent in the 'learning logs' in which pupils work with their parents to record relevant experiences enjoyed outside school. Sketchbooks have not yet achieved their potential in promoting pupils' research skills throughout.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic about art and design lessons. They are used to evaluating their work together through a regular cycle of displays. During the visit, teachers in all years shared examples of pupils' work, were well informed about the purpose and took pride in achievements.
- A good sequence of activities ensures that the pace of lessons remains brisk. Teachers use their generic teaching skills well to stimulate pupils' interest, through the use of digital technology, challenging questioning, and progress reviews with pupils focused on objectives achieved.
- Support staff make an effective contribution to pupils' learning in art and design through systematic organisation of resources, materials and equipment, attractive displays that present pupils' work sympathetically and well judged support for pupils in need of additional help.
- Teachers model creativity effectively for the pupils through demonstration or by developing unusual ideas for creative activities. For example, in Reception the children were invited to paint outside a picture of the autumn trees, with different mixtures of mud.
- Nevertheless, in some classrooms the remains of a 'template' culture contrasts starkly with pupils' diverse responses to more open-ended opportunities.
- Adults circulate effectively in the classroom to provide constructive advice to pupils about how to move their work on. The assessment

scheme enables staff to track pupils' progress in relation to different strands of the attainment target.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- The art and design curriculum is integrated effectively with other subjects while retaining a clear focus on subject specific objectives. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used consistently well in the context of art and design.
- Several topics make the art and design curriculum relevant to the pupils by linking topics to their direct experiences. For example, work inspired by the architecture and grounds of the school or local landmarks such as St Albans Cathedral.
- The long term curriculum overview of the subject provides a clear framework for progression. However, the responses of the most able artists indicate unrealised opportunities to personalise the curriculum in order to accelerate progress and deepen their knowledge and skills.
- The schemes of work enable pupils to encounter a wide range of art, craft and design from different times and places. Gallery visits and artists in residence are used strategically to enrich particular units of work.
- Teachers are committed to the new scheme of work being used but know that the best teaching is likely to involve their personal stake in its success. This is also evident in the continuation of favourite projects from previous schemes that teachers have continued successfully.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The subject leader is enthusiastic and active about promoting links with other subjects including design and technology, her other area of responsibility.
- Subject specific self-evaluation is used effectively to identify successes to build on and priorities for improvement. The subject action plan provides a secure basis for continued development.
- Staff are fully involved in reviewing the subject through collaborative planning and presentations about their displays. However, there is currently no systematic observation of lessons by the subject leader.
- The different units of work are resourced efficiently. Risk assessment is thorough.
- A portfolio of work from all years contributes to moderation of standards achieved by different classes. Nevertheless, there is insufficient use of examples which distinguish between different levels of ability by individual pupils in response to a shared starting point.

Subject issue: How effectively the work of other artists, craftworkers and designers is used to promote the pupils' creativity.

This is good.

- Teachers actively encourage pupils to express and exchange views about the work of other artists.
- Pupils often use media unlike that used by the artist whose work is studied. Nevertheless, they are able to identify other connections.
- The good work in the early years could be further enhanced by introducing pupils to the work of other artists when reviewing their creative achievements.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- increase opportunities for the most able young artists to pursue work
- develop the use of sketchbooks
- track pupils' creative development as part of assessment in the subject.

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector