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Dear Mrs Brown

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 9 October 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 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: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observations of five lessons or part lessons.

Art and design

The overall effectiveness of art and design was judged satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are below average.

- Pupils make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points. On entry to Year 3, pupils' prior experience of art and design is inconsistent. Pupils in all years are currently making satisfactory progress. The progress made by the current Year 5 and 6 pupils during the early part of Key Stage 2 was inadequate.

- Evidence of the standards reached by pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 indicates that their knowledge, understanding and skills in art and design are below national expectations.
- A strength of pupils' work in all years is their ability to express imagination through the subject. For example, the vibrant paintings created by Year 3 in response to poetry. Conversely, they also use art and design to express their imagination through writing. For example the Year 6 poetry inspired by 'The Scream' by the artist Edvard Munch.
- Boys and girls learn how to express their feelings through their art and design. For example, the mixed-media work created by Year 5 using emotive colour and symbolic surface textures in response to literature.
- Drawing skills are competent, reinforced explicitly in design and technology and through independent drawing at home. Weaker drawings are connected to insufficient observation.
- Pupils use the context of art and design to apply skills developed in other areas of the curriculum. For example, information and communication technology (ICT) is used confidently and creatively alongside other art media. They were also observed using their 'talking partners' effectively to criticise the work of other artists, an approach developed across the curriculum.
- The school's drive to improve pupils' literacy skills has had a positive impact on their use of specialist vocabulary in art and design. In all years pupils use the visual elements of line, shape, form, colour, texture and pattern accurately in analysing their own work and others.
- Pupils explore different art media confidently but their competence in refining skills limits the maturity of their work. For example, sound claywork and printmaking in Year 4 could be transformed into highly effective achievements with continued work.
- Pupils have very limited knowledge of artists, craftworkers and designers from different times and places. However, where pupils are engaged in activities that promote awareness of different work by the same artist they enjoy the opportunity to make a personal interpretation of the artists' work. For example, the Year 4 close-up studies of different Van Gogh paintings and drawings.
- Boys and girls are enthusiastic about their work in art and design. They are able to sustain concentration during curriculum projects that involve working over long periods of time. Some pupils also support additional opportunities through clubs to use their interests as a stimulus.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are satisfactory with good features.

- The school's survey indicated that teachers' confidence in art and design is widely variable. This is evident in the fluctuating standards of art and design work achieved by pupils. Nevertheless, teaching seen during the inspection had the following good features:
 - Lessons started with a strong stimulus
 - Demonstration by the teacher made the expectations of pupils clear

- ICT was used effectively to show pupils a range of relevant images
 - Teachers used and explained specialist language
 - Resources were good quality and well organised
 - Display was used effectively in some classrooms to inform and inspire
 - Pupils were able to see that the teachers were enthusiastic about art
- Some lessons anticipate the needs of pupils with different abilities effectively, but differentiation is an inconsistent aspect of planning.
 - During lessons, teachers provide helpful feedback to pupils about their progress. In the best lessons this contributes to a system of project assessment that includes self assessment by the pupils.
 - A weak aspect overall is teaching pupils how to refine their skills by revisiting ideas, techniques or subject matter explored previously.
 - A strong feature of teaching is the use of photographic images of the pupils' work alongside that of famous artists. This technique elevates the pupils' achievements and enables them to review their own work, the work of other pupils and famous artists on equal terms.
 - Support staff make a significant contribution to pupils' learning, including a leading role in the teaching of the older boys and girls.

Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory.

- Expectations of pupils at the start of Year 3 are informed by a very limited range of information. Nevertheless, a bridging project between Key Stage 1 and 2 provides good opportunities for pupils to express their imagination in two and three dimensional media.
- The school's recent focus on promoting progression through a ladder of painting skills and colour concepts is effective. However, overall planning between Years 3 to 6 promotes insufficient continuity and maturity of skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Visual elements are used effectively to focus pupils' activities and select artists, craftworkers and designers' work that exemplify these qualities. For example, contrasting images by Damien Hirst, Kandinsky, Paul Klee and Keith Haring were used to illustrate interpretations of pattern.
- The curriculum is enriched by clubs that enable pupils to use the subject to respond to purposeful challenges. For example, pupils have used their art and design skills very effectively to respond to issues explored by the 'eco' club. External competition themes are welcomed.
- Whilst the curriculum does not yet ensure that a visit to an art gallery is an experience for all pupils, some have worked with local artists or talented parents through creativity projects. Pupils also benefit from the 'Wednesday options' when teachers work to their strengths.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are satisfactory.

- Supported by senior and support staff, the subject leader has improved the inadequate provision that led to the low expectations and standards that still constrain the achievements of current pupils. The school now has a clear strategy to raise standards in art and design.
- Collaboration is a strength. There is an effective approach to team work established in the school to maximise the impact of planning. Liaison with the Milton Keynes Arts Education Forum is also positive in helping to raise awareness of initiatives and standards elsewhere.
- The subject leader is enthusiastic and well informed about national initiatives. For example, there are plans to use the 'Big Draw' and the 'Artsmark' initiative to promote further improvement in the subject.
- Professional development is effectively managed. Information about the needs and interests of pupils and staff is used well to target training, evaluate the impact and make strategic decisions about how to overcome the limited confidence expressed by some staff.
- Resources are managed efficiently. The development of a 'gallery' of images linked to specific units of work has a positive impact on pupils' curiosity. A display of large mixed-media drawings created by staff on a recent in-service course engaged pupils in strategies for improvement.
- The school is committed to broadening the achievements of pupils having prioritised on improving their key skills. The school's importance statement about art and design education expresses clearly how the subject contributes to this aspiration.

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

This is satisfactory.

- The curriculum introduces pupils to a satisfactory range of work by different artists, but the work of contemporary craftworkers and designers is under represented.
- Resources are used effectively to promote pupils' creativity when different examples of pupils' work are used alongside those of other artists. For example, in response to a shared theme or method of work.
- When pupils experience original art it increases their creative aspirations. For example, pupils responded to a display of teachers' in-service work by expressing excitement about the idea of 'working big'.

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

- develop the use of sketchbooks
- provide teachers with a clear plan of progression
- increase opportunities for pupils to learn how to observe
- enrich the curriculum with first hand experiences
- raise expectations and awareness of what is possible

- enable pupils to learn how to refine their work through 'revisitation'.

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