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Ms K Ellis
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Dear Ms Ellis

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 July 2009 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 how effectively connections to the work of other artists, craftworkers and designers 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 an interview with you as head teacher, subject coordinator, discussions with pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observations of three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of art and design was judged to be good

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Children enter Reception class with slightly below average skills in their creative development. They make good progress in this area because of the care taken by staff to ensure children take part in an exciting range of activities and use stimulating materials. For example they develop good skills in designing three-dimensional (3D) artefacts in clay and are accomplished in manipulating the tools to smooth, cut or texture their creations.

- In Reception class children are already using sketchbooks to plan and develop their ideas. For example, using their designs to make their 3D objects and then creating the colours, planned and mixed as examples in their sketchbooks, to decorate them when dry. Such grounding ensures that children enter Key Stage 1 working at least securely, and often above the expected level in the relevant early learning goals.
- Pupils continue to make good progress through Key Stage 1 and 2 and by the age of 11 many attain standards that are at least average and sometimes above that found nationally. In the best lessons pupils are encouraged to consider the work not only of famous artists of the past but also of contemporary artists; working alongside them and understanding the qualities of their work and the materials they use and what it is like to be a creative practitioner. This also helps pupils to extend and develop their ideas and improve the quality of their work. Such opportunities are not consistently in place across the school.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who have especially good talents in art, also make good progress because of the support and guidance they receive by teachers and other adults in class.
- The 'Art Transitions Project' undertaken by Year 6 pupils has accelerated the progress they make; the quality of their work is high and the variety impressive.
- Sketch books have been used throughout the school for a number of years and children become increasingly successful in using them to develop ideas, practice their skill and evaluate the outcomes of their work. In the best examples teachers provide good feedback on pupils' achievements, through annotations on their work. Pupils say they value these comments as it enables them to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work. Sketch books show pupils' developing maturity in thinking and acting like artists and by the end of Year 6, are well prepared for their transition to secondary school.
- Pupils value opportunities to exhibit their own work publicly. For example, a large number exhibited their portraits in a local leisure centre and Year 6 pupils have displayed their work in Beamish Museum and in the local secondary school. This has had a positive impact on pupils' determination to achieve well.

Quality of teaching and learning of art and design

Teaching and learning is at least good.

- Teachers are confident and enthusiastic, reflected in pupils' positive responses. Good relationships between adults and pupils and pupils' excellent attitudes and behaviour are typical of all lessons. Consequently children are able to express their ideas confidently and assuredly. They talk with conviction about how they develop ideas, plan and select the materials to carry out their work and how proud of they are of their achievements.
- Lesson planning is detailed and differentiated, linking well to the programme of study and key themes for each term. Plans include key assessment questions to help teachers evaluate pupils' work. Learning

objectives are clear, teachers explain them well and these are used to reflect on the successes of pupils at the end of lessons.

- Lessons often begin as whole class discussion but very quickly pupils are encouraged to explore their own ideas, select visual and other information and adapt and refine their work using their sketchbooks. As a result, activities are varied and help to sustain pupils' interest and enthusiasm.
- Regular oral feedback to pupils in lessons is good. It helps them to know how well they are doing and enables them to describe what is good about their work, what could be better and what they may wish to do to improve or change it.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- Over the past year, there has been significant investment in developing and resourcing the curriculum. It is well planned and ensures that pupils are challenged to make good progress across all elements of art, craft and design as they move through school. Schemes of work are carefully considered to ensure pupils learn to manipulate and investigate an increasingly broad range of materials, media and tools, including using information and communication technology (ICT) to design and create images as well as for research.
- Pupils are encouraged to develop ideas from imagination and observation in class, around the school grounds and in the local community. For example younger pupils visit a local allotment, working with teachers and members of the local community, sketching the area and the vegetables they have grown.
- Alongside skills and knowledge, pupils learn to develop the language of art. From Reception the children begin to use specialist language in their sketch books and in discussions about their work with adults and visitors. By the end of their Reception year they confidently recall the artists whom they have studied and the qualities of the work they have produced.
- Effective cross-curricular links enhance pupils' enjoyment of the subject. For example pupils related with enthusiasm the opportunities they had to study artists through a modern foreign languages project. Children in Reception class had developed sad pictures of their friends in the style of Picasso's 'blue period' as part of a topic about feelings and emotions.
- Older pupils added to the views expressed by younger pupils that the art curriculum promotes enjoyment, noting that they value opportunities to work independently and in groups but especially on whole class collaborative projects such as creating the large 'Venetian gondola and the bell towers of Venice' they had displayed proudly.
- The curriculum is extended effectively through art clubs but opportunities to learn from, and work with contemporary artists and craftworkers are more limited. Recently, pupils have benefited greatly from working with a local artist during a project about the 'Trimdon Grange mining disaster' and have produced their own art work in his genre.

Leadership and management of art and design

Leadership and management are good.

- Art, craft and design has had its profile raised significantly since your arrival as headteacher. In little more than a year you have worked effectively with the subject leader, developing and implementing a coherent and well planned two-year strategy. Together you have successfully targeted improvement in the quality of provision and accountability of the subject and this is making a positive difference to outcomes for pupils. Pupils themselves testify to the impact of changes made in terms of their enjoyment of the subject, the wider opportunities provided and their achievements.
- Subject monitoring is developing through scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning. Moderation of pupils' work is now embedded and samples of pupils' work, graded against national curriculum levels, are used termly by teachers to assess the progress their pupils have made and to plan for their future learning.
- Good use is made of peer-evaluation and teachers' regular dialogue with pupils about their views of their work, including in their sketchbooks, to gauge pupils' response to their learning. The outcomes of such evaluations are used well by the subject leader to identify priorities for the subject's development.
- The subject leader provides clear direction for the continuing improvement of the subject and has developed accurate self-evaluation which identifies well the strengths and areas for further improvement. For example, she is aware that more needs to be done to assure rigour in the assessment of pupils' work and this is becoming more formalised from September.
- The subject leader seeks constantly to raise the profile of the subject and improve its quality. For example, by working with local primary schools and secondary school in an 'Art Transition's' project. This is not only making a difference to the quality of art in Year 6 but is instigating developments and raising expectations across school. She maintains up-to-date knowledge and understanding of developments in the curriculum through regular networking with other art co-ordinators regionally and working with the local authority art adviser to refine and improve long term and medium term planning and resources for the subject.

Subject issue: how effectively do connections to the work of other artists, craftworkers and designers promotes pupils' own creativity

This is satisfactory.

- Pupils have many opportunities to study the work of internationally renowned artists from the past where they use their styles to develop their own original art and use as a stimulus to develop their creativity further. For example, their extensive and varied work in the style of the Cubists. Their understanding of the work of artists from other cultures is also developing effectively, through the multi-cultural aspects of theme weeks and visitors to school such as a Chinese artist. However, there are fewer opportunities for pupils to understand the work of, or work alongside, contemporary artists and craftworkers as specialist professionals, and

experience their work first hand through visits to school or by visiting their places of work. There are also few opportunities to experience art, craft or design in public galleries or spaces. Plans are in place to extend such opportunities from September.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increase opportunities for pupils to engage with art outside school by working alongside contemporary artists, designers and craftworkers, visiting art galleries and displaying more work publicly.

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

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector