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5 October 2009

Mrs N McIntyre
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Dear Mrs McIntyre

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 23 September 2009 to look at work in art, craft 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 pupils learn to draw with confidence 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 you and the deputy headteacher, the subject leader, pupils in Years 3 to 6, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, and observation of three lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is inadequate.

- Pupils' work in Year 3 indicates that their skills, knowledge and understanding in the subject at the start of Key Stage 2 are below average overall. Despite some work that shows promise, their progress is not

sustained sufficiently within or between years to raise standards to the levels achieved nationally.

- Specific displays showing satisfactory standards included portraits inspired by Van Gogh in which Year 5 pupils had developed their colour-mixing skills and explored surface texture. Weaker work exposed pupils' limited control of media or tools, leading to insufficient accuracy or sensitivity to capture detailed observations or depth of ideas.
- Pupils' sketchbooks contain some satisfactory work, for example, recording of facial features to prepare for portraits in Year 3 and different patterns designed for tile-making in Year 4. However, work in sketchbooks and on display indicates that pupils revisit and refine their skills insufficiently.
- Pupils were generally positive about the subject. They enjoyed talking about lessons linked to different artists or art movements, but some wanted more opportunities to develop their own style. Their interest was apparent when talking about museums and galleries visited with their families or experience of art made 'accidentally' by experimenting.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

The quality of teaching of art, craft and design is inadequate.

- Satisfactory teaching of art, craft and design was observed. Teachers and support staff were enthusiastic when introducing lessons and supporting individuals. Materials and equipment were well prepared and organised. Promising work achieved by individual pupils was accurately spotted and used effectively to inspire others. However, wider evidence of pupils' work indicated that the quality of teaching is too inconsistent to promote or sustain pupils' progress.
- Art, craft and design lessons include a variety of activities. However, how different activities contribute to the objective of the lesson or scheme of work remains unclear to too many pupils. Activities are managed effectively, but complicated organisation diverts attention from a clear focus on developing and building specific skills well.
- Pupils' work is displayed satisfactorily in the art studio and around the school. Displays promote pupils' curiosity in the subject successfully, but they do not focus sufficiently on raising pupils' creative aspirations. The more confident teachers and support staff use demonstrations to increase pupils' awareness about what might be possible.
- Assessment is at an early stage in the subject. Pupils are beginning to refer to the 'pupil speak' levels that have been developed to help them to understand how to improve. However, some pupils show insufficient initiative, volunteering few answers or simply waiting for instructions.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

The quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design is inadequate.

- The schemes of work developed by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority provide an adequate basis for teaching individual units of work. However, additional planning is insufficient to promote pupils' progression

across Years 3 to 6 in learning about the visual elements of line, shape, form, colour, texture and pattern.

- Lesson plans clearly identify what pupils 'must', 'should' or 'could' achieve. While this approach is effective in encouraging teachers to consider different outcomes, using different starting points for pupils with varied skills, knowledge and understanding in the subject is an area for development, making more of teachers' ability to manage a range of lesson activities.
- A sound feature of the curriculum is a 'portraits' unit in each year group which creates an opportunity to monitor pupils' progress in exploring a similar theme. While the success of this recent initiative is not fully proven, it illustrates the value of planning adapted to the school's context.
- A satisfactory range of picture and book resources is available for reference and some pupils are able to add their personal experience of museum and gallery visits. One group of pupils worked with a visiting artist to create an animation. However, not all pupils visit a gallery or work with a visiting artist as part of the curriculum. This limits their understanding, for example about the scale, range or impact of work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

Leadership and management in art, craft and design are satisfactory.

- The impact of senior leadership and management on developing a structure for effective subject leadership and management is a strength. For example, documentation for the subject is generally sound and opportunities to engage staff and governors in improvement are established. However, while strategies have had a proven impact on improving standards in the core subjects, senior staff recognise that standards are not yet high enough in art, craft and design.
- The development plan for the subject provides an adequate basis for improvement. While the focus on pupils' attainment should be strengthened, the strategies to improve provision appear sound. The development of a specialist art studio and systematic observations of art, craft and design teaching are in place.
- The 'pupil speak' levels of attainment illustrates the subject leader's capacity to develop an informed, whole-school approach. A portfolio of pupils' work has been started. However, there is not enough analysis and annotation of pupils' work to aid teachers' assessment and ensure that high standards are explicit.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and provides an appropriate basis for improvement. A visit to the Gladstone Pottery is planned. An art club has been introduced. The subject leader has been trained in financial management. However, senior leaders are also aware that some of the approaches used to raise standards in other subjects could be applied.

Subject issue: The effectiveness with which pupils learn how to develop their confidence and creativity through drawing is inadequate overall.

- Sketchbooks are used in all year groups. However, pupils use them too infrequently to develop their drawing skills in different curriculum contexts.

There are few opportunities for pupils to learn how different artists use sketchbooks.

- Where pupils have been taught to explore the tonal qualities of pencils, standards of drawing are satisfactory. For example, Year 5 pupils were able to recreate the mood of Lowry's work by applying a range of pressures. Pupils handled small scale tentatively but effectively.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards and improving pupils' progress in Years 3 to 6 by:
 - ensuring that art, craft and design teaching in all classes is effective, building on the enthusiasm of teachers that was observed
 - ensuring that pupils are inspired by work of a high quality, learning how to revisit and refine the quality of their own work
 - increasing the use of sketchbooks to develop drawing skills, promote experimentation with media, and analyse the work of other artists
- improving the curriculum in art, craft and design by:
 - making expectations of teachers and pupils clearer with regard to progression in using line, shape, form, colour, texture and pattern
 - using school visits or visitors to engage teachers and pupils in the approaches and achievements of artists, craftworkers and designers
 - developing more ownership of schemes of work by using the different expertise of teachers and interests of pupils to adapt planning
- increasing the impact of subject leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that subject development planning identifies measurable outcomes for pupils so that improvements can be checked
 - monitoring the use of the new assessment scheme, supported by exemplification and annotation of the school portfolio
 - maximising resources available, such as the specialist art studio, to promote large-scale and collaborative work.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft 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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector