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Mrs Handford
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Handford

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 16 March 2010 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of five lessons, two of which were literacy lessons where art is used as a stimulus for writing.

The overall effectiveness of art, craft and design is outstanding.

Achievement in art, craft and design

Pupils' achievement in art, craft and design is outstanding.

- From broadly average attainment on entry, pupils make very good progress so that by the time they leave, standards achieved are good and often outstanding. This is because skills, knowledge and understanding are built upon systematically alongside the many opportunities for pupils to creatively express ideas and learning across the curriculum.
- Pupils develop outstanding personal qualities. The school's successful focus on developing pupils' self-esteem and confidence through art ensures this.

They display high levels of ability, independence and confidence in their lessons, which prepares them very well for the next phase of their education.

- Boys and girls are cooperative and supportive of one another. However, opportunities to work collaboratively on large-scale projects are limited.
- Pupils are encouraged to think of themselves as artists. They ask questions and seek to explore artists and styles for themselves. They successfully exploit opportunities to develop diverse responses to similar starting points.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Staff are highly skilled and hold high expectations; some are active artists. Their very good subject knowledge, together with outstanding relationships, ensures that pupils are keen to take an active part in lessons. Observational drawing skills are developed particularly well in a range of media.
- Lessons are prepared carefully and build well on pupils' prior learning, ensuring they work at a level pitched to their individual abilities, but with enough challenge to develop their ideas and thinking further.
- Teacher assessment is ongoing and regular, feeding well into the developing lesson and future planning. Pupils become quite adept in talking about, and evaluating, the quality of their own work, that of their peers and the many artists they discuss; articulating their views confidently in lessons.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Art is embedded across the curriculum. It is used as a stimulus in many lessons, particularly literacy, and successfully promotes pupils' knowledge, understanding and their developing skills, creativity and independence.
- The balance of skills-based learning and 'focus and enrichment days' extend the curriculum successfully and harnesses pupils' interest and creativity.
- Pupils value their artist-teachers, alongside the variety of resources within the local area that stimulate their ideas. For example, they have drawn inspiration from the large sculptural work in the Marina and the opportunities to visit galleries and exhibitions to see work, such as the art of Lowry in the Winter Gardens, and contemporary glass craftworkers' and artists' work in the National Glass Centre.
- The use of information and communication technology promotes pupils' enjoyment and achievements further. Many use specialist equipment successfully, including digital cameras, for example to produce high quality calendars.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

The effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design is outstanding.

- Art, craft and design permeates the school because of the passion, commitment and value placed on the subject. A key feature of the effectiveness of leadership is the whole-hearted way that all staff embrace the subject and put it at the heart of how they work with the result that pupils can make good or outstanding progress in their learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and skills result from regular professional development activities. These involve all staff learning techniques they will teach to children. By 'doing it themselves', not only helps to improve their own skills but enables them to model effects to pupils. Consequently, all are confident and keen to promote pupils' interest and enjoyment. This is clearly evident in the high-quality oil pastel work by pupils and staff.
- Top-quality displays of pupils' art, craft and design work fill the school and pupils are rightly proud of their achievements.
- Monitoring and evaluation are constant, through lesson observations, scrutiny of planning, and review of pupils' work; in some classes work is annotated and in all, pupils' own evaluation of their work influences future planning.

Subject issue: how effectively pupils learn to draw with confidence and creativity

Pupils' learning about how to draw with confidence and creativity is outstanding.

- This is a strength due to the meticulous way that skills are taught and the way pupils can develop their ideas in an atmosphere of openness and trust; particularly from observed starting points.
- They quickly learn how to handle different media well, so that the skills developed with pencils are reflected and further developed successfully in crayons, chalks and charcoal or oil pastels.
- Because of the cross-curricular nature of art, pupils develop ideas and record their work in project books and 'focus week' books. They act as sketchbooks and this is helping them to develop their ideas and to think like artists. The impact of this approach is being reviewed later in the year.

Examples of good practice

- Links between art and literacy are exemplary. The development of pupils' art appreciation and their critical evaluation skills are honed expertly.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing more opportunities for pupils to work together on large-scale collaborative projects.

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

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector