

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr G. Rees
Headteacher
Sandwich Junior School
St Bartholomew's Road
Sandwich
Kent
CT13 0AS

Dear Mr Rees

Ofsted survey inspection programme – art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2 February 2007 to look at work in art, craft and design.

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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in art, craft and design are good.

- Pupils make good progress and reach above average standards. They develop confident control of two and three dimensional processes and use specialist vocabulary well in talking about their work.
- They have good knowledge of a focused range of artists, designers and craftspeople, including contemporary practitioners.
- They understand well the elements of visual language, for example using tone to describe form or a range of different marks to show texture. However, pupils do not always have enough opportunity to use their understanding to develop their own, more individual ideas.
- Pupils enjoy the subject. They record the development of their work well in sketchbooks, although some on-going evaluations lack the depth necessary to drive their ideas forward.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in art, craft and design is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They plan well but sometimes focus too much on what pupils will do rather than what they will learn. Most make judicious use of exemplar work to model ways of working.
- Teaching has been strengthened by professional artists coming in to school over the last year and a half as part of the Creative Partnerships (CP) initiative. While CP is having a good impact on the pupils directly concerned and broadening teachers' understanding of arts practice, the specific approaches adopted are not embedded in teachers' subsequent work so as to sustain their legacy.
- Pupils receive regular and useful guidance for improvement in lessons and have good opportunities to assess their own work. However, too little use is made of National Curriculum levels when assessing work in order to monitor pupils' achievement over time.

Quality of the curriculum

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

- The curriculum is based on nationally available materials but is well tailored to school needs, in particular linking work with other subjects. Pupils study a good range of genres and themes to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in logical sequences.
- Pupils' systematic introduction to different ways of recording directly through observation is a strength of the curriculum. They would benefit from more opportunities to balance this by exploring ways to represent their emotional response to the world around them.
- Curriculum provision is enriched well, for example by visits to galleries and work with contemporary arts practitioners via the CP initiative.

Leadership and management

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

- The subject plays a strong role in the life of the school. Teachers are well supported in delivering the subject and there is a positive legacy of high standards and of pupils' enjoyment.
- Subject leadership is shared by you and a colleague working effectively together in monitoring and evaluating the subject. The outcomes are used well to define improvements, for example the requirement to develop the CP work so it has more lasting impact. Nevertheless, development plans do not record all of these comprehensively.

Subject issue - the contribution of the subject to students' creative development

Pupils' creative development is good.

- Pupils' creativity is evident in their confident exploration of materials and processes and in their ability to sustain their work over significant periods of time. They are not afraid to make mistakes because most teaching encourages experimentation within the parameters of projects. In a minority of teaching, the outcomes are too pre-determined to enhance pupils' creative decision making.
- Creativity is valued and sought by the school although there is no shared definition enabling its development to be securely measured.

Inclusion

The inclusion of all students in the subject is good. Lessons are planned to cater for all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities. As a result, pupils respond well and make good progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to offer pupils more scope to develop personal responses to projects
- to strengthen the tracking of pupils' achievement by referring to measurable criteria, for example National Curriculum levels or agreed features of creativity
- to improve strategic subject development by ensuring plans clearly identify the actions to be taken and how the impact will be measured.

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

A copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector