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Mr C Whitehead
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Dear Mr Whitehead

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 24 and 25 June 2009 to evaluate your 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 schools 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 senior staff, the subject leader and groups of pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' sketchbooks and current work including a guided tour of displays by pupils in all years, analysis of portfolios of work, observations of three lessons in the Nursery, Key Stage 1 and 2, and art club.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage start with limited creative experience to draw on, evident in their tentative exploration of different media and marks. They make satisfactory progress in learning how to express their imagination visually, experiment and make choices. However, representational drawings in the portfolio, computer

aided work on display, and three-dimensional work in response to a whole school project, show that pupils work carefully and thoughtfully in response to stimuli provided by adults in school.

- In Key Stage 1 pupils make good progress. A particular strength is their response to natural stimuli and the work of other artists. For example Year 1 pupils used their experience of making collaborative sculptures inspired by the work of Andy Goldsworthy to create well crafted collages using a range of natural materials. Observational work by Year 2 pupils inspired by flowers in the classroom and school garden showed close observation and a range of drawing skills in response to the teacher's demonstration and work of Georgia O' Keefe.
- In Key Stage 2 pupils continue to make good progress, gaining more confidence in expressing their individuality, their ideas and feelings. Imaginative work inspired by the work of Kandinsky shows that pupils are able to select colours, compose shapes and apply drawing skills. Consistently good work is achieved in a range of 2D, 3D, textile and computer based media. Many pupils progress to achieve above average standards in their observational work in Years 5 and 6, inspired by their experience of gallery visits and work with practising artists.
- Pupils' evaluations of their own work and sensitive but constructive views about the work of their peers, inform their progress within each unit of work. Nevertheless, pupils could use their sketchbooks more frequently to keep their ideas, observations and skills alive during the half term when the curriculum focus shifts to design and technology. Particularly, the most able young artists could make more use of the skills developed in each unit to pursue work or mix different media.
- In all years pupils enjoy the subject. Art club is popular with boys and girls in different years, keen to refine their skills. Pupils interviewed were clear about the relevance of the subject to their personal development through reflection and collaboration, and recognised the value of creative development for their work in other subjects. They are attentive listeners and intensive workers, taking pride in their achievements. Interpreting the work of other pupils and artists' work they had encountered, revealed their depth of thinking.

Quality of teaching and learning of art and design

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers observed during the visit were confident when demonstrating skills and techniques to pupils. They also used a thoughtfully selected range of contrasting examples created by boys and girls in the class. This provided a strong message to pupils that there were many different ways of achieving the objective and that originality is valued.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to share examples of work by other artists. In one lesson the teacher used a computer aided camera to project her demonstration onto the screen, enabling all pupils to see very clearly and for the attention they had given to images of other artists' work to shift seamlessly into her demonstration projected on the same screen.

- Objectives for lessons are challenging but attainable. Teachers share objectives clearly with pupils and return to them when reviewing pupils' progress during, and at the end of, lessons. Pupils show pride in their work but know how to make further improvements. However, ongoing assessment across different projects is underused to track and promote pupils' progress in reaching levels of attainment. Sketchbooks could be used more continuously to contribute to evidence of pupils' progress in art and its application in other subjects.
- Teacher and support staff develop good relationships with pupils and promote support between pupils. The alert response of pupils to their teachers enables staff to manage a busy pace and variety of activities within lessons. Good questioning by teachers, particularly in relation to images shared, ensures that pupils look closely and respond thoughtfully to stimuli, and the views of their peers.
- Effective use is made of available resources. For example, during the visit one class visited the school garden to make drawings from direct observation. Exhibitions of students' art work in nearby secondary schools are visited by the pupils, developing creative aspirations about what might be possible if they continue in the subject. In the classroom, through good questioning and evaluation, pupils are challenged to explore the creative potential of materials available.

Quality of the curriculum

The art, craft and design curriculum is good.

- The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to work in a range of two and three-dimensional art media in all years. The use of digital media as a creative tool is more inconsistent. However, the whole school focus on improving pupils' drawing skills provides a good model of progression that has had a discernible impact on raising standards.
- Work with practising artists contributes well to pupils' knowledge and understanding of art from different times and places. Analysing a metal sculpture at the entrance of the school one pupil explained that the use of children's silhouettes joined together gave visitors an immediate impression that pupils with different cultural backgrounds are unified because they are all children and share enjoyment of the same school.
- Specific art projects successfully promote the school and its locality as a cohesive community. Working to the theme 'Learning together' teamwork between pupils, parents and teachers across the school has been promoted, inspired by artist Ann Carrington. A totem pole inspired by visiting artist Polly Laycock also enabled all involved to reflect on the importance of recycling 'waste' materials.
- Visits to art galleries including Tate Britain, The Wallace Collection, The National Portrait Gallery, are used effectively. The school ensures that all children learn about the value of visiting an art gallery. During the visit pupils in all years were able to talk about a display of work from their year group, evaluating the work effectively. The school website contains further examples of their evaluative skills.

- Connections are made with other areas of the curriculum and cross-curricular links are being strengthened through a 'Creativity Focus Group'. In one lesson observed imagery and literacy were skilfully combined through paired work matching words to drawings promoting their development in both areas of the curriculum.

Leadership and management of art and design

Leadership and management in art and design are good.

- The subject is well led and managed by a respected subject leader skilled in and knowledgeable about, art, craft and design. The senior leadership team is supportive and committed to the subject recognising its impact on the community ethos of the school, and its contribution to individual pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, drawing is used regularly by senior staff to help pupils share and overcome particular anxieties proving a barrier to their learning.
- The impact of subject leadership across this unusually large primary school is supported by specific staff in each year group who are confident in teaching the subject and who support other staff in their year. The portfolios of work in each year and regular displays of work by every year in public areas of the school, also contribute to making shared expectations explicit.
- The school self-evaluation of the subject is accurate and the priorities for improvement appropriate. Nevertheless, links could be made more explicit between the subject and school improvement plans. For example, the specific contribution of the subject to the whole school priority to 'develop links across the curriculum, encouraging creativity and critical thinking'.
- Listening to pupils and acting on their views is a good feature of subject leadership, evident in the design of a 'graffiti' project in response to pupils' interest. The strength of their feelings about the topic was communicated not only through pupils' designs but also through some powerful and persuasive letters completed in literacy lessons.
- The subject leader ensures that her work with pupils is an example of good practice to others. Leading the art club and supporting pupils in their competition entries are examples of the subject leader's direct impact on pupil participation. Art based visits and visitors are managed effectively, the focus clearly on inspiring all pupils, including those with particular talent or with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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

This is good.

- The clear emphasis on first hand experiences of different stimuli inspire the pupils and enable them to understand the relationship between their own work and that of well known artists, craftworkers and designers. For example, pupils observed in the school garden the same plant forms that had inspired artists whose work was shown in the classroom.

- Opportunities to discuss the work of practising artists during their visits to the school, add further depth to pupils' understanding. Whilst pupils talk about their work intelligently they could curate their displays more frequently to enable pupils not directly involved to learn from their experience.

Examples of good practice, which we discussed, included:

- the art, craft and design curriculum providing all pupils with an opportunity to visit an art gallery and work with a practising artist
- the portfolios of work in all years providing teachers with different examples of achieving objectives and making expectations explicit
- the quality of pupils' observation and drawing skills providing a key subject skill to apply in art and other areas of the curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop the use of sketchbooks as a continuous record of pupils' experiences and development from the start of school
- develop pupils' confidence to work expressively, on a large scale, and in mixed-media by revisiting and applying existing skills in new ways
- develop links between whole school and subject development plan to ensure that the impact of the subject is maximised.

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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector