

Overview

The subject continues to make a significant contribution to pupils' creative development and impacts positively on the learning environment in the majority of the primary schools visited by inspectors. Particular strengths are evident in the early years of schooling; the quality and confidence of pupils' perception and mark-making in the Foundation Stage show that pupils meet the challenge of high expectation. At best this reflects a profound understanding by teachers of pupils' personal development and the skill to match this to enabling opportunities in the subject. However, progression through the National Curriculum remains a weakness; the successes of individual projects are insufficiently built on through effective long term planning or individual assessments of pupils. Interest and enjoyment expressed by pupils and stimulated by teachers and artists throughout the National Curriculum remains insufficiently clear to pupils, parents and indeed many teachers as a level of achievement.

Commentary

Pupils' achievement is good or better in ten of the thirty primary schools in the sample and inadequate in five. Overall, making remains the strongest element of pupil's work; knowledge and understanding the weakest. Collaborative two and three-dimensional work on a large scale often challenges pupils to learn together about creative processes and promotes effective outcomes. Individually, sketchbooks continue to play an important part in developing their ability to record ideas, observations and express imagination. However, where achievement is inadequate it is often pupils in Years 5-6 that make insufficient progress. This is often connected to limited opportunities for pupils to revisit and refine subject skills, deepen subject knowledge or apply competences developed elsewhere; where this is the case pupils perceive the subject as less important as those they are going to be tested on. Inspection evidence overall reveals more outstanding teaching in the subject in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2; within key stages the most effective teaching is in Year 1 and Year 3. The ownership and quality of lesson objectives are significant factors; weak planning continues to focus on activities rather than learning. Curriculum continuity remains a weakness between key stages and across the primary-secondary interface.

Strengths in the subject

- Evidence of creative development in the Foundation Stage analysed well
- Pupils' personal qualities developed in and through the subject; concentration, confidence and collaboration often significant
- The subject is inclusive to pupils with diverse literacy and numeracy skills and enables different ethnic influences to contribute to their achievement
- Learning through first hand experience; work with artists, visit to galleries, environmentally based projects continue to make a profound impact
- Subject leadership driven by a clear vision, informed by good subject knowledge and supported by committed whole school leadership
- Impact of the Arts Council 'Artsmark' scheme effective in developing subject self-evaluation; external partnerships and national initiatives such as the 'Campaign for Drawing' significant in raising and informing expectations.

Weaknesses and barriers to be overcome

- Evidence of progression often restricted to a small part of the curriculum; little analysis of pupils' ability to use digital, 3D media or apply knowledge and understanding of the art of others
- Experiences and outcomes remain prescriptive for many pupils; limited teacher understanding restricts opportunities for pupils to make choices, pursue the creative potential of ideas and media, express individually
- The achievements of talented pupils often emerge incidentally; many pupils express a desire to do more art and their productivity out of school remains unguided. Many Year 5/6 pupils consider that the school gives low status to the subject
- Insufficient continuous professional development in the subject; too much dependence on narrow subject knowledge and understanding
- Long term planning and tracking individual pupils progress remains weak; assessment contributes little to pupil progress and is often about encouragement rather than development

Self-evaluation reveals weaknesses in monitoring of teaching, dependence on subject knowledge of co-ordinator and preoccupation with results.