

IMPROVING Art and Design

in Post-Primary Schools

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:-

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number.

INTRODUCTION

The findings in this paper are based on inspections of and visits to art and design departments in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland during the period 1996-2000.

1. Strengths

- 1.1 The large majority of art departments are characterised by very good relationships between the teachers and the pupils and among the pupils. The quality of the relationships frequently enables the teachers to make an important contribution to their pupils' pastoral development. The teachers are hard working and committed and most provide a lively and stimulating learning environment for their pupils.
- 1.2 In most departments, the planning for lessons provides sufficient detail regarding content, learning outcomes, teaching strategies and progression. In a majority of departments, collaborative planning with other departments ensures relevant links with other subjects.
- 1.3 In around half of departments, the pupils are encouraged to develop personal responses and the teachers integrate effectively the educational themes into their teaching to include themes based upon, for example, political, environmental, cultural and moral issues.
- 1.4 In a majority of departments the work is sound; there is an appropriate emphasis on the development of the pupils' technical skills and on providing well-planned opportunities to apply these skills within a specified, creative context. Contextual and critical studies are integrated effectively into planning, and teaching and learning are enhanced by the involvement of visiting artists and designers and by visits to local businesses, museums and galleries.
- 1.5 In a minority of schools where practice is most effective, an appropriate range of assessment methods is used sensitively. Self and group assessment, the regular setting and marking of homework and effective feedback from the teacher inform the pupils of their progress and contribute positively to both the development of their self-esteem and improving their communication skills. Where assessment is good, assessment methods or approaches are specified in the planning of individual teachers, criteria are shared and understood by the teachers and the pupils.

2. Areas for Improvement

- 2.1 In a minority of schools the quality of teaching is less effective, the teachers' planning is inadequate and the schemes of work are not reviewed

and evaluated regularly. The teachers' expectations of the pupils are too low and lessons are often characterised by a teacher-led presentation of narrowly defined, unchallenging tasks. Differentiation by outcome is the most commonly used strategy to meet the requirements of the less able pupils; this approach does not always address adequately the needs of all the pupils.

- 2.2 There are too few opportunities for the pupils to work directly from primary sources, to experiment with, and to develop an appropriate range of technical skills and to have a clear understanding of the design process.
- 2.3 In a significant minority of departments assessment is not as effective as it should be; self-evaluation by the pupils of their own work is not used systematically to inform subsequent teaching or to encourage progression; assessment criteria are not sufficiently defined by the teacher or understood by the pupils; homework, when set and marked, contains insufficient, personalised, annotated guidance given to help the pupils refine and develop their skills and ideas.
- 2.4 In a few cases, the school's senior management is insufficiently aware of the work of the art department and arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in the department are not as effective as they should be.
- 2.5 The quality of the facilities and the ancillary support for art and design is varied. The majority of art departments have no ancillary support; information and communications technology (ICT) resources are generally poor and where they exist they are not always used effectively. The use of photographic darkrooms is often problematic, mainly in regard to compliance with health and safety regulations. There is a need to review the way in which photography is taught, to take full cognisance of current technology and to comply with the requirements of the programme of study. Storage facilities are generally inadequate for three-dimensional work, large scale two-dimensional work and the retention of pupils' work to be used as exemplar materials. In instances where these inadequacies are prevalent, the range of art and design activities is limited and consequently has an adverse effect on standards.

3. Priorities for Action

Given the areas of weakness above, and to promote further improvement in the teaching and learning of art and design:

- 3.1 in planning, greater attention should be given to the sequential development of technical skills, in particular visual research from primary sources, the use of ICT and coverage of photography;

- 3.2 heads of department and the senior management of schools need to adopt a more rigorous approach to the monitoring and evaluation of the provision in art and design;
- 3.3 teachers need to develop and/or use a broader range of assessment strategies and ensure that assessment outcomes influence teaching and learning;
- 3.4 there is a need for assessment to be clearly defined in the teachers' planning to include sufficient information regarding assessment criteria and strategies. The pupils' evaluation of their own and others' work should be integrated effectively into teaching and learning and not carried out as a discrete, unrelated task;
- 3.5 in resourcing art and design departments, senior management needs to maximise the expertise of the teachers and allocate appropriate accommodation, notably for storage and adequate resources, including technical support.

CONCLUSION

Schools and the Inspectorate recognise the importance of self-evaluation as a basis for improvement and development. It is intended that this publication, and the publication 'Evaluating Art and Design', will support art and design teachers and departments in their evaluation and improvement of their teaching and of their pupils' learning and standards of achievement.

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