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High expectations in art, craft and design as part of a whole-school approach: Aston Fence Junior and Infant School

URN: 106859

Local authority: Rotherham

Date published: 6 January 2014

Reference: 130251

Brief description

Aston Fence Junior and Infant School displays outstanding art, craft and design work in all years. The headteacher's high expectations of staff, the inspiration of a well-informed subject leader and the continuous teaching and support given to pupils by staff in the classroom and through educational visits, all contribute to pupils' high achievement in the subject.

Overview – the school's message

'Our vision for Aston Fence is one of high standards achieved through the creative aspects of the curriculum, and the sense of purpose, relevance and the excitement in learning which this approach constantly exposes children to. Art, craft and design is very much central to this vision. We place emphasis on the use of first-hand experience based on the environment of the school and further afield. The quality of the first-hand experience is extremely important. We plan carefully to ensure that it meets the needs of the children and the curriculum, that it further develops the full range of skills needed by the children and that it promotes breadth and balance in their work.

We are confident that our approach enthuses the children and leads to some exciting art, craft and design work within the overall topic-based approach. Art, craft and design provides visual, tactile and sensory experiences and a special way of understanding and responding to the world. It enables children to communicate what they see, feel and think through the use of colour, texture, form, pattern and different materials and processes. We also believe that children want to come to school because of the art, craft and design experiences to which

they are exposed and that these have a positive impact on other areas of the curriculum, including the core subjects.

There is nothing more rewarding than seeing the look of joy and sense of pride when a child has his or her art, craft or design work on display. We are not perfect and we don't get it right all of the time, nor do we please everyone all of the time, but we care – we care deeply about all of our children and we are passionate about what we think is right for the primary aged child.'

Darren Clegg, Headteacher

The good practice in detail

Leading by example

The headteacher's passion for art, craft and design education is explicit.

Pupils' work dominates displays in classrooms and public areas throughout the school. Other displays used as teaching tools, for example to support pupils' literacy or learning in mathematics, are limited in space but also attract great attention due to the focus of displays and frequency with which material is changed.



Mixed media work in pastel and textile

The school buildings and grounds provide an aesthetically stimulating environment for learning. The high quality of display techniques managed expertly by a teaching assistant, show high regard for pupils' work. The standard is consistently high throughout the school.

It is clear that as pupils progress through the school they strive for the high standards of presentation demonstrated by teaching and support staff.

The juxtaposition of pupils' drawings and paintings with their writing makes pupils take great pride with the accuracy and presentation of their handwriting. Fluent writers ensure that their art work, used as illustration, is of equally high quality. Art, craft and design-based

experiences are often used to add purpose to writing.



Mixed media work in pen and wash

Aston Fence Junior and Infant School
Good practice example: Schools

The pupils make connections between art, craft and design and other areas of learning:

- 'We do different techniques in our sketchbooks before we do art. I really like art because it helps you to write better.' – *Leoni, Year 4 pupil*
- 'We've been learning to make our drawings 3D. Art's like science – you have to look really closely. Art gives you a steady hand.' – *Elliot, Year 4 pupil*
- 'We do lots of pencil work. Art is important because it is fun and keeps children interested. You can learn about history when you do art.' – *Connor, Year 6 pupil*



Observational drawing from models inspired by Bruegel for a project about 'Children's Games'

Staff are confident that when pupils apply their art, craft and design skills to subjects such as design and technology, their standards rise.



The display of pupils' working sketchbook pages ensures that messages about high quality 'finish' are complemented by examples that show the importance of practice, experimentation and learning from mistakes. Teachers also maintain sketchbooks; like the headteacher, they too lead by example.

The role of the subject leader, who is also the deputy headteacher, in modelling the expectations of staff is fundamental. Her role effectively translates the headteacher's vision into reality by organising staff training events, introducing new ideas having tried them with her own class, and supporting staff in adapting them. Regular visits to art galleries and artists' studios by the subject leader, recorded in her sketchbook, stimulate discussion and support teachers' planning.

Promoting self-evaluation at all levels

The strong presence of pupils' work throughout the school enables staff to regularly evaluate the impact of their teaching and that of their colleagues.

When the high expectations made of the youngest children are clearly met, or exceeded, the challenge for older pupils and their teachers is clear.

Systematic photographing of pupils' work contributes to a digital portfolio that enables staff to evaluate pupils' current work in relation to their previous work. The array of images stored also help to moderate standards. A selection of original pieces forms part of the school's extensive archive of pupils' work. This resource also enables pupils to evaluate their own work in relation to previous pupils, respected as 'other artists, craftmakers and designers'.



Work by Year 3 inspired by the book 'Badger on the Barge' by Janni Howker, a visit on a barge and visit by a badger in school

All staff contribute to school assemblies which they use to showcase the work of their class. These are also used as valuable opportunities for teachers to evaluate the work of their colleagues. The use of 'walk around assemblies' which incorporate visits to all classrooms to learn about work in progress, provides further insight into the teaching and learning methods used.

The headteacher's lesson observations also include the use of video which enables staff to evaluate their teaching objectively and collaboratively.



The 'Celebration of Learning' book

Preparing pupils to make the most of their first-hand experiences

The curriculum includes opportunities for all pupils to learn through a wide range of school-based work, educational visits and residential experiences.

However, staff are well aware that in order to make the most of these opportunities, pupils need to be well prepared.



Work by Year 3 inspired by the book 'Badger on the Barge' by Janni Howker, a visit on a barge and visit by a badger in school

Observation and recording are key skills developed to a high level in school before pupils apply these skills in other settings. Pupils discover the creative potential of different media; experiments with graded pencils and powder colours are explored by all classes.

- 'I like drawing. Clay is goeey and sticky – I didn't like the feel of it. The more you do it, the better you'll get. I've learnt about shades.' – *Daisy, Foundation Stage pupil*
- 'I get nervous about pastel on my fingers; I prefer pencil. If you do art you'll get a good job. We do art about Castleton and Peak Cavern.' – *Jacob, Year 2 pupil*
- 'Art enhances learning. It makes the children think about the topic they're doing. Children can take an artefact and represent it through a range of media.' – *Teaching assistant*



Work inspired by a visit to Clumber Park by children in Foundation Stage 2

Pupils are taught how to 'look'. Hand-eye coordination is discussed, demonstrated and reinforced. The very well-presented handwriting that sits alongside carefully controlled drawings shows the impact.



Work inspired by a visit to Burbage Valley in Derbyshire by Year 5

Artefacts are chosen to really challenge pupils' drawing skills. The location of educational visits and residential experiences are also selected to provide plentiful visual stimulus.

These are frequently changed to ensure that all pupils enjoy memorable experiences that are a surprise.

Teach pupils 'never to give up'

In all years there is evidence of high quality work that pupils have persevered with. For example, impressive paintings of local buildings, often on a large scale, show that pupils are able to mix many different shades of brick, stone, and slate.

Mixed-media work shows that pupils are able to embellish work that is already effective.

Well-planned cross-curricular work contributes to pupils' intensive, in-depth analysis of stimuli, approached through different subjects.

This demands sustained interest and resilience by the pupils as they fully pursue the creative potential of subject matter 'through the eyes of an artist'.



Quilting work inspired by a visit to Beamish Museum representing the pattern of a wall in the street

Celebrating difference

The school's aim to 'promote pupils' independence, secure in the knowledge that it is safe to fail' is achieved largely through their art, craft and design education. Risk-taking within a well-managed environment characterises the approach taken by staff and this is reflected in



Pastel and fabric work following a visit by Year 1 to Whirlow Hall Farm

pupils' purposeful play with materials. Teachers devise and interpret topics creatively. Pupils look for opportunities to personalise their work.

From the start of school, pupils are encouraged to make decisions for themselves, which is evident in the size of paper, choice of surface, and media they select. Well-presented topic books show the diverse range of work that evolves from the same topic. Topics such as 'Through the keyhole' are sufficiently open-ended to promote creative interpretation.

Difference is valued by the pupils, staff and parents and carers:

- 'Children invest time and effort in their art work. The atmosphere in school is calm; a result of children being taught well and the school's curriculum. The displays and celebration assemblies are motivating.' – *Mr Dungworth, peripatetic PE teacher*
- 'The schools looks as impressive as an art gallery. Art is an important part of the curriculum and deserves to be on display in school and at home.' – *Mrs Green, parent*
- 'I am astounded by the standard of artwork. Even the youngest children create a high level of detail and mix amazing colours. The variety is wonderful. The children are very proud of their work.' – *Mrs Phillips, parent*

The school's background

Aston Fence Junior and Infant School is an oversubscribed, one-form entry community primary school serving the local community and further afield, including Sheffield. The school welcomes a large number of visitors who often take topic folders and examples of art work away with them to share with their colleagues back in their own educational settings.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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