



National Society for Education in Art and Design; Professional Development.



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The 2009 OFSTED and Research Comments

- Why do some pupils underachieve in Art & Design?
 - What are the issues?

Key OFSTED points



March 2009 report: *Drawing on Art, Craft and Design*

Boys on average continue to achieve considerably less well than girls. Inspectors found that boys' achievements rose when they were given opportunities to work for a practical purpose, for example by using digital and three-dimensional (3D) media. However, often they were seen to lose interest and make limited progress where craft and design work was neglected, when they spent too much time writing, and when research was confined to homework

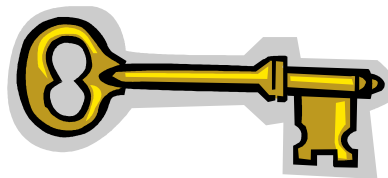
Girls often made more rapid progress than boys. They were more likely to take an art and design course in Key Stage 4 and attained higher grades. Good achievement by boys was associated with a broad art, craft and design curriculum, relevant lessons and the directness of teachers' feedback.

Achievement and standards in Key Stage 3 were good or outstanding in just over half of the schools surveyed. National unvalidated data from teacher assessment support inspectors' judgements that there is a wide gap between the proportion of boys and girls achieving Level 5 or above, with girls outperforming boys, and that attainment has remained almost static in recent years.

At Key Stage 4, the subject is a popular and successful option nationally. The proportion of students who follow an examination course is higher than in any other arts subject and, for girls, higher than in humanities subjects. However, the proportion of girls taking GCSE (60% of entries) is rising, as the proportion of male candidates is slowly declining. Boys and girls do well in relation to their other subjects and the percentage achieving A* to C grades is high and improving. The gap between the performance of girls and boys remains wide but, as Table 1 indicates, it has narrowed slowly from 20% in 2004 to 17% in 2008.

The impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on achievement and standards in the subject has been surprisingly slow, given the prominence of digital technology in the creative industries and cultural sector. Many of the schools surveyed had yet to adopt several of the recommendations made in Ofsted's 2004 report, particularly the need for greater differentiation when using ICT. However, there were signs of improvement in important areas and the good attainment by boys in the subject could often be attributed to the enhanced provision of ICT.

Key OFSTED points



Nationally, standards in art and design at A level are above the average for other subjects. Three times as many girls as boys study the subject and reach the higher grades at A level. Three times as many girls as boys study vocational courses in the subject. Attainment on vocational courses, both in schools and colleges, is above average.

Lessons that also disappointed students, particularly boys, started well and stimulated lively discussion, only to lead to low-level writing tasks.

A challenge for all those involved in teaching art and design is presented by the choices students make at age 14, when their programme of National Curriculum art and design finishes. In recent years, the relatively low proportion of boys choosing art and design courses and the significantly higher results attained by girls across different types of schools have raised additional and serious concerns. **Notably, the overall decline in boys' participation in examinations has coincided with an increase in fine art courses and a growing emphasis on fine art in general courses**, suggesting that the curriculum, particularly the neglect of craft and design, could be at the heart of the problem.

This survey sought to identify causes for the wide gap in achievement between boys and girls, and to find examples of effective practice in primary and secondary schools where boys and girls achieved equally well in the subject. The success factors can be summed up as: breadth; relevance; communication; and rewards.

Breadth



Relevance



Communication



Communication

- Many forms of communication are used in a typical art and design lesson, in addition to the looking and making that many pupils particularly value. In the best lessons seen, written tasks or discussion between pupils and their teachers and peers included opportunities to use visual communication.
- Enjoyment of the subject's visual and tactile aspects attracted some students to choose it. **However, the boys interviewed during the survey often expressed their disappointment at finding that they were expected to write in a subject that they had chosen because it was practical. Written work was the least successful aspect of boys' achievement, whether completed in lessons or as homework.** However, the quality of writing had been improved in the schools that had worked with English departments or gallery educators to provide supportive frameworks that helped pupils to structure their responses. More generally, in these schools, most of the written tasks were not matched sufficiently to the pupils' literacy levels. They neither challenged the more able nor supported the least able. Occasionally, support staff had adapted tasks to help overcome an individual pupil's learning difficulties and/or disabilities. But few of the secondary departments had established a continuing relationship with support staff. The lack of different starting points for writing in the subject had a particularly negative impact on boys in Key Stage 3. This influenced decisions about taking a GCSE in the subject. Too little consideration had been given to the issues raised in Ofsted's 2003 report on tackling boys' underachievement in writing, for example, making writing tasks purposeful and using writing to support thought.
- In non-written tasks, boys and girls of a wide range of abilities valued the use of first-hand sources and a strong focus on individual tutorial-style teaching. This was particularly the case in the secondary schools visited. **Teachers considered boys to be more responsive to advice given through discussion, rather than through written comments or grades. This supported research findings that boys benefit from regular dialogue initiated by the teacher.** However, the contribution of boys to class discussion was also impressive. In many of the lessons observed, there were active, articulate boys and more passive, reticent girls but these differences were rarely identified in teachers' assessments or lesson planning.
- The form and specificity of communicating lesson objectives also played an important part in how much different pupils were involved. Almost all the teachers observed planned that the needs of pupils of different abilities would be met through the outcomes of the work. There was little differentiation by the tasks set. Work tailored for a particular ability group usually involved setting a higher level of challenge for gifted and talented artists in separate sessions. In lessons for pupils of mixed ability, teachers often communicated the objectives to pupils with little indication that different responses were welcomed. Some lessons were successful in improving achievement because boys and girls, who were rarely considered able in other subjects, were encouraged and given the opportunity to shine. Pupils whose behaviour in other subjects had been challenging were often praised for their cooperation in and commitment to art. These were almost always boys, a topic explored in the next section about non-conformity and creativity.

Yes he can – schools where boys write well (HMI 505), Ofsted, 2003; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/505.

S E Rose, R P Jolley and E Burkitt, 'A review of children's, teachers' and parents' influences on children's drawing experience' 25.3, NSEAD/Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006, pp 341–349.



- Teachers who were successful in attracting **boys** as well as girls to studying the subject were alert to the possible impact of image and stereotypes. At the time of the year when students were choosing which subject to study further, teachers used portfolio talks by older pupils effectively to explain the content of the course, demonstrate its relevance to their lives and also challenge stereotypes. **Nevertheless, in secondary departments that had given too little consideration to gender stereotyping, a surprising number of Year 10 courses started with themes considered by the boys as 'girl friendly', such as 'larger than life' flower projects inspired by the American artist Georgia O'Keefe. This is a complex but important issue if the curriculum is to ensure that all pupils are included.** Male and female artists, craftworkers and designers from the past and the present have been inspired by a wide range of subject matter. But students were often very conscious of what their peers might think of their choices. Curriculum and lesson planning that set out to be inclusive clearly succeeded when teachers were sensitive to the varying perceptions of their pupils, peer group pressures and other influences on them. Good relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers or visiting artists promoted participation. Rewards
- The mismatch referred to earlier between art, craft and design in school and the world outside is not just about contemporary practice. It is also about the way that work in school is primarily made for display, while that outside fulfils a wide range of more practical purposes. **The boys interviewed found the subject particularly rewarding where a practical brief was set. They liked the use of deadlines and feedback, and were fascinated to know about art and design in the real world, including the financial rewards the subject can bring.** Too often, the teachers observed overlooked the continuous press coverage given to art-related issues, such as a controversial exhibition, record auction price achieved or design trends. The students interviewed generally knew little about the phenomenon of celebrity artists, yet discussion of such people can inspire and inform pupils about possible long-term rewards.
- Rewards take many forms and can start with assessments that acknowledge success quickly and provide swift guidance about the next steps to take. However, in the schools surveyed, the use of levels and grades to set targets and measure progress meant nothing to the pupils without direct reference to the work they were doing at the time. It was common for teachers to display work that illustrated the difference between one grade or level and another. But displays were not always refreshed with examples of current projects that made the point explicit. **The one-to-one discussions that regularly punctuated the best examination courses worked particularly well with boys.** They were noticeably less prepared to carry out speculative work on the off-chance that it might succeed. **Agreeing the most beneficial approach with their teacher before embarking on it was favoured by the vast majority of boys seen.** But the teachers who were aware that students could easily remain too dependent on them ensured that the level of guidance was reduced progressively.



- ◇ In summary, where the subject was popular with and successful for both boys and girls, the following features were evident.
- ◇ **The breadth of the curriculum embraced art, craft and design.**
- ◇ **Digital media were valued alongside 2D and 3D work.**
- ◇ **Materials and processes that involved tactile experiences were plentiful.**
- ◇ **Different research approaches were explicitly taught in lessons.**
- ◇ **Pupils created work for a range of purposes, including practical functions.**
- ◇ **The achievements of female as well as male artists were celebrated.**
- ◇ **Feedback was regular and systematic and involved direct scrutiny of work.**
- ◇ **The personal experiences and imagination of pupils were valued.**
- ◇ **Opportunities to continue work after school were regular.**
- ◇ **Long periods of coursework were punctuated with short, timed activities.**
- ◇ The following features were evident in schools where improvement in boys' performance remained slow.
- ◇ **The range of drawing techniques taught was narrow, reinforcing pupils' insecurities because what they were possibly 'best at' remained undiscovered.**
- ◇ **Classrooms were uninviting for potentially messy or large-scale work.**
- ◇ **Presentation, particularly of sketchbooks, was emphasised at the expense of content or creativity.**
- ◇ **The work of different artists, craft workers and designers was rarely used to challenge stereotypes.**
- ◇ **Choices were made by teachers and rarely by pupils.**
- ◇ **Pupils' own experiences and imagination had little influence on their art, craft and design work.**
- ◇ **The responses of different pupils to varied stimuli were rarely analysed or used to adapt and modify planning.**
- ◇ **Subject matter focused on natural forms and starting points focused on observation.**
- ◇ **Pupils were expected to use writing to demonstrate their understanding.**
- ◇ **Assessment grades given with out comment or understanding.**

OFSTED



Checklist



Give learning a purpose by showing the big picture

Relate boys learning to their experiences & choose resources with this in mind

Make learning active by allowing boys the opportunity to explore ideas through problem solving

Use a variety of learning styles & multi sensory approaches

Provide boys with choice

Give opportunities for talking

Use technology

Develop boys skills by explicitly developing key skills and teaching strategies in these areas e.g. memory skills, thinking skills, planning and organising

Break down learning into clear steps to encourage boys to experience success and to prevent them giving up quickly

Give instant feedback and spontaneous specific praise and as this builds on small successes and develops self esteem



the 3 strand approach

To tackle underachievement,
a three strand approach is suggested:

Improve the quality of
the teaching and the
learning: respond to
curriculum changes
and OFSTED report.

**Audit the
Curriculum.**

Broader strategies,
self-esteem,
aspiration,
motivation.

**Include in all your
planning**

Closing that gap has
to be a

**Targeted
intervention.**

**HOW? WHY?
WHAT? HOW?**

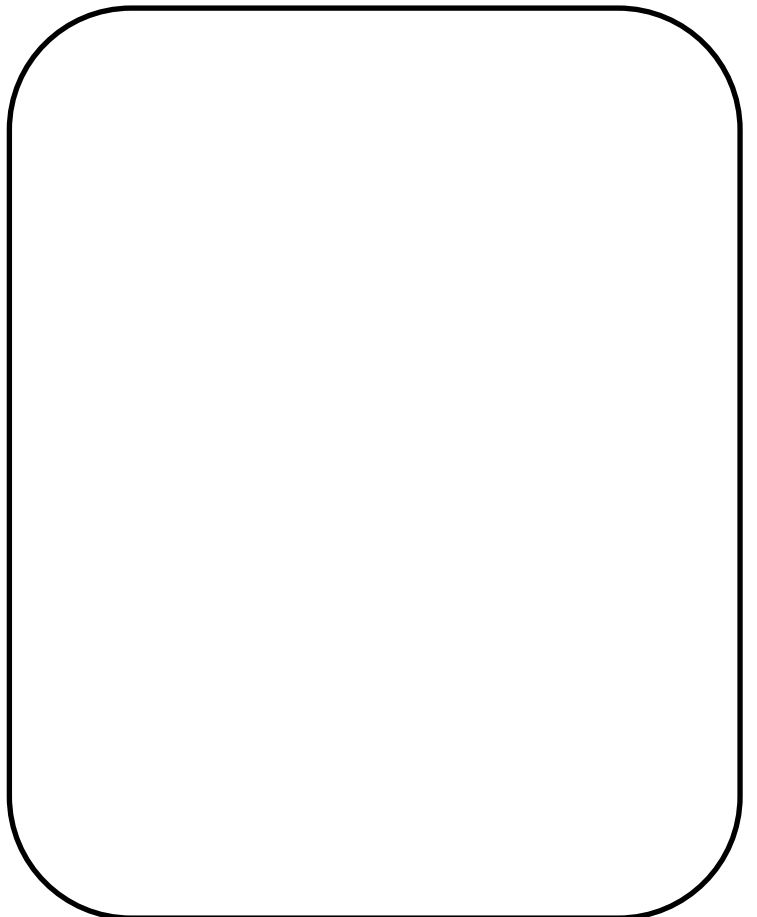
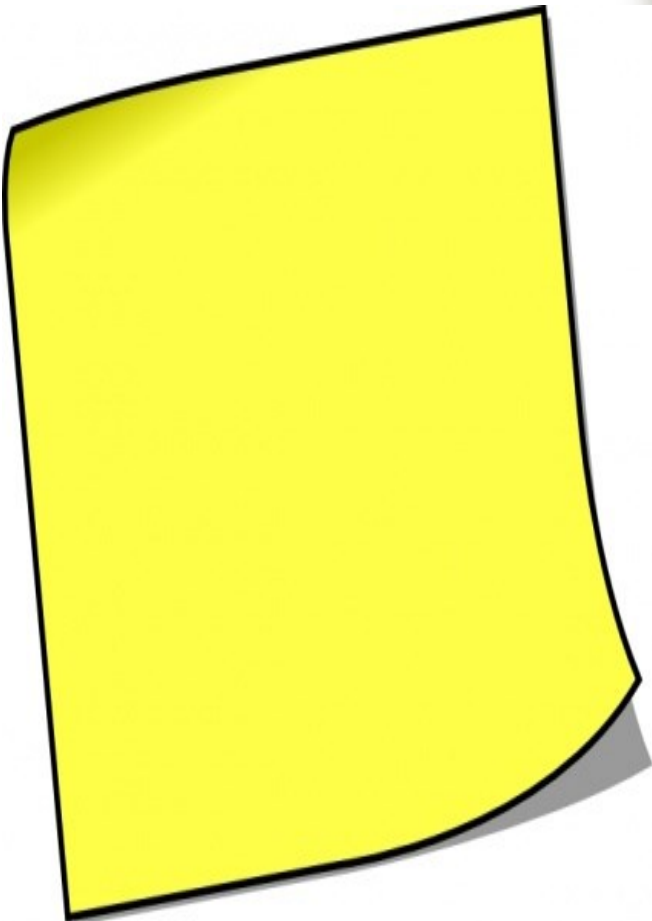
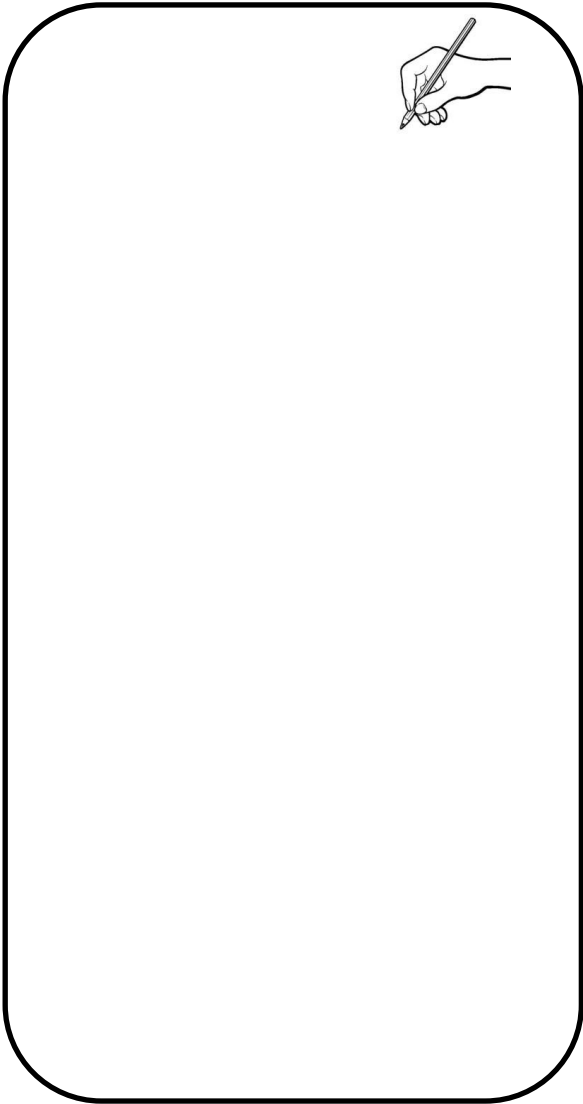


Notes:



When I get back to school/college, my next step is.....





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