

# Research Review Series: Art and Design

## Introduction and background

In April 2021, Ofsted began publishing a series of subject reviews, bringing together research evidence about different subjects. This latest addition to the series explores research relating to art and design. It aims to identify factors that contribute to high-quality school art and design curriculums, assessment, pedagogy, and systems. This understanding of subject quality will be used to examine how art is taught in England's schools. The review draws on a range of sources, including Ofsted's 'Education inspection framework: overview of research' and the 3 phases of our curriculum research.

Ofsted is keen to highlight throughout the report that there is no one method of teaching and learning art and design. For this reason, it speaks throughout of elements which 'may' rather than 'must' be included in a high-quality curriculum.

## Key points

### The nature of art and design: Context

- Art is constantly evolving – since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it has expanded to include photography, performance, installation, and digital media.
- Art, craft, and design are practical in nature, and are partly based on studio practices. They are also informed by related academic disciplines, including the history of art, aesthetics, and art criticism.
- Art makes an important contribution to pupils' overall education. Schools must offer a broad and balanced curriculum, and a high-quality education means that pupils are taught 'a full range of subjects for as long as possible.'
- Children first encounter art and design in the early years foundation stage (EYFS). High quality practice at this stage stimulates children's imagination and interest. These foundations are a prerequisite of future success.
- All children must study art in Key Stage (KS) 1, 2, and 3. The KS3 curriculum also needs to give pupils the breadth and depth of knowledge necessary for them to be successful at key stage 4 and beyond.
- At KS4 and KS5, pupils have the opportunity to study art both for its own sake and to further their career aspirations. They can gain both depth and breadth of knowledge, which enables them to pursue a range of artistic interests and specialist pathways.
- Recently, the number of specialist art teachers training in England has declined, as has the number of taught hours provided to pupils at both primary and secondary. An art curriculum which significantly limits the amount of time given to the subject is unlikely to benefit pupils.
- Data from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) suggests there were more entries for GCSE art and design in 2022 than in 2010. However, compared with 2002, the number of entries for GCSE art and design in 2022 were similar.

### Curriculum and domains of knowledge

- An art curriculum sets out what is meant for pupils to get better at art. This involves the development of 3 types of knowledge – practical knowledge, theoretical knowledge, and disciplinary knowledge. Ofsted do not expect schools to use these terms, but an art curriculum should include all 3 types. The connections between these types of knowledge should also be taught.
- Practical knowledge relates to pupils' ability to make and create art. The National Curriculum stipulates that pupils need to be taught to draw, paint, and sculpt and to use other techniques (e.g., print making, graphic design, photography). School leaders need to have a rationale for which of these elements they include in the curriculum. They also need to ensure that these areas are not covered in a superficial manner.
- Theoretical knowledge is about meaning and interpretations, materials and processes, and journeys through time. It allows pupils to put their practical knowledge in context.
- It is important for pupils to learn about the historical, cultural, and societal contexts in which art is made. An art curriculum should draw on traditions from across the globe.
- Disciplinary knowledge concerns the way in which art sees itself as a discipline. It involves learning how aesthetic judgements are made, how art is studied, and how to participate in the discourse of artists, scholars, and critics. When pupils develop disciplinary knowledge, they can begin to make sense of and judge claims that are sometimes made about art.
- Within each of the above domains, knowledge can be categorised as productive or receptive. Productive knowledge means becoming proficient in the aspects of art or producing art. Receptive knowledge means learning about the aspects of art- e.g., being able to recognise subject-specific vocabulary.



- As pupils progress through an art curriculum, they should build the 3 forms of knowledge that we discussed above. They should be able to know more, remember more and do more. When pupils 'know more', they can develop latent capacities to 'do more' in art, and so develop their expertise.
- Knowledge between different components of the curriculum should be connected.
- Effective sequencing means organising activities so that they develop and build upon the ideas and skills that students have previously acquired. For example, when pupils know colour theory, they are better equipped to use colour to communicate a particular mood and suggest meaning.
- Endpoints in art can be understood as either 'convergent' or 'divergent'. Convergent outcomes are those which are more prescribed, such as being able to mix secondary and tertiary colours. Divergent outcomes are those where pupils have more choice, and they are therefore likely to produce work which differs from that of other pupils. Some pupils may, for example, create a single object whereas others may produce multiple objects.
- Sufficient opportunities for practice need to be built into the curriculum. Leaders should also consider how pupils can revisit curriculum components so that they have enough time and opportunity to master content and embed it in long term memory.
- 'Sequencing for practice' in art and design is the process of thinking through how to support pupils' learning by breaking down the main components that they need to practise.
- The casual use of the term 'creativity' is unhelpfully broad. It is too general to be functionally useful in determining curriculum content and how art is taught.
- A subject-specific use of the term 'creativity' includes the key idea that pupils can be creative in art, craft, and design if their knowledge and skills in a particular area (domain) are sufficiently developed.
- It is important to move beyond everyday assumptions about creativity in art and recognise that, when pupils generate 'creative contributions', they draw on the knowledge and skills they have developed within the domain they are learning.

### Pedagogy

- The curriculum is the 'what' of curriculum design, whereas pedagogy is the 'how'. It embodies the methods and approaches of teaching art and design. Pedagogical decisions should flow from the curriculum content which teachers want pupils to learn. This helps them to avoid choices that focus on pupils being superficially engaged, but do not actually help them to learn crucial subject knowledge in the long-term.
- In high-quality art education, teachers recognise that specific pedagogies will be necessary to teach different forms of subject knowledge (practical, theoretical, and disciplinary).
- When teaching practical knowledge, teachers will consider how sequences of learning are used to build knowledge. They will consider how to provide purposeful practice which leads to automaticity. They will also consider cognitive load, i.e., recognising that working memory has a limited capacity. It also means ensuring that pupils have the knowledge to move on to the next stage.

- The domain of theoretical knowledge is extensive. When teaching this kind of knowledge, teachers should direct pupils' attention towards the precise ideas, concepts, and principles which they want them to learn. They may, for example, use technology to isolate portions of the art, craft, or design work that illustrate the content they want pupils to learn.
- Disciplinary knowledge is often abstract. By providing concrete examples of abstract concepts, teachers can help pupils to understand them. Disciplinary knowledge is essential for students to appreciate and make sense of visits to museums and art galleries.

### SEND

- Although some pupils with SEND may require adaptations to be made for them, pupils with SEND do not generally benefit from differentiated teaching, activities, or resources. Expectations of pupils should not be unnecessarily lowered.

### Assessment

- It is important for teachers to design assessments which reflect the subjective nature of art, but which remain subjective and reliable. However, it is important to note that there is no absolute validity and reliability in art assessment, since issues about subjectivity can challenge both the validity and reliability of assessment practices. Teachers should be clear about what they are assessing and why they are assessing it.
- Formative assessment provides immediate feedback, supporting improvements in the task at hand. Summative assessment should be carried out at sufficient intervals to determine how well pupils have learned the planned curriculum content.

### School systems and time

- Whole school teaching and assessment strategies are likely to be too generic to fully capture the knowledge embedded in an art curriculum. Leaders should therefore ensure that policies are adapted to different subjects.
- In primary school art, craft, and design is often linked and connected with content from other subjects, such as mathematics, religious education, and history. In secondary schools, art, craft, and design might be blended into work around well-being in personal, social and health education. A well-sequenced curriculum can help pupils make links and connections between different subject areas. However, there are risks to the quality of art, craft, and design when they are taught in carousel or lumped together with all content in the visual and performance curriculum.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers are supported to develop their subject and pedagogical content knowledge. Without this, they will not be able to develop and provide a rich curriculum. Subject development is a particular issue in primary schools. Research by Green and Mitchel (2002) found that around two thirds of primary trainees did not feel confident about teaching arts subjects.

The full documents can be downloaded from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-art-and-design>