

Mind the Gap Between the National Curriculum in Art for Primary Schools & Ofsted

The [National Curriculum for Art in England](#) is a scant, 2 page document. Many teachers complain that it isn't aspirational enough, or doesn't give enough guidance, whereas others embrace its simplicity as giving space for them to interpret it in their own way. Whatever your view, it is an out-dated document in much need of revisiting by the DFE.

Alongside the Curriculum, we have the updated [Education Inspection Framework](#), setting out how Ofsted will inspect schools.

And between the two, we have a gap – to some an unfathomable chasm which is increasingly difficult to navigate. The Framework is increasingly specific and technical in language and approach, and seems to bear little resemblance to the guidelines in the Curriculum. Two elements make this situation worse. Firstly, it seems there is no allowance made for the fact that learning about and through art is not like learning about other subjects, and the same parameters cannot be applied. Secondly there has been no provision for investment in teaching art (ITT or CPD), on a government level and often on a local level, so

that teachers are deskilled and inexperienced.

The load imposed by Ofsted is considerable, and teachers are fearful of getting it wrong. What are Primary school teachers meant to teach? How are they meant to teach it?

Lack of training, expertise and experience means there are many rumours circulating about what Ofsted is looking for (rumours not just amongst individual teachers but also amongst schools and SLT), and how best to teach art. It is, in the words of many authoritative voices, “a mess”, and worse, it is unfair on teachers and pupils, because ultimately it makes teaching stressful and learning unrewarding.

There are places teachers can go to for help, and whilst we ride through this storm made up of misunderstanding, lack of guidance, and contradictory pedagogies, AccessArt would like to show primary teachers where they can find that support, and clarify a few key points about the current Framework and potential Deep Dives in art in your school. Above all, our message to you is that it is completely possible, even as an inexperienced teacher to provide a rich and engaging creative curriculum for your pupils – and just as importantly it can be rewarding and pleasurable for you too.

Thank you to Jennifer Gibbs, HMI, Subject Lead Art & Design, Ofsted, who kindly met with AccessArt to

discuss the topics below.

What Is Ofsted Aiming To Do Through The New Framework?

According [Gov.UK's Education Inspection blog:](#)

"We'll be looking at the substance of the education or training on offer: the curriculum, the design and the content of learning programmes. In essence, we'll look at what learners are being taught, and how well they're being taught it. Managers and staff in providers will be asked to explain why and how they deliver the education and training programmes offered."

So how does that translate down into the subject focus of art?

Ofsted wants teachers to be knowledgeable about their subject areas. It's not sufficient to have a series of lessons planned, Ofsted want to see the connectedness between lessons, across all years. They want to hear **WHAT** you are teaching, **WHY** you have chosen to teach it, and **HOW**. This is hard stuff... because they want you to ask big questions:

"What does it actually mean to study art? The approach your school takes to curriculum planning should be informed by that key question. The curriculum's intent should set out some of the big ideas, skills and goals that you

want children to acquire or come to understand from learning art and design. The intent will reflect the national curriculum, but there is great autonomy for schools to define this for their context and pupils. There are many routes to a good art education and different schools rightly choose different content to include in their curriculum. As a result, Ofsted does not have a preferred curriculum model in mind but instead uses the principle of progression to evaluate quality. So, during a deep dive, inspectors will ask you to explain the rationale behind your curriculum; define the end goals of pupils learning? And focus on what is being taught at each stage and phase to build towards this? Teachers are asked to think hard about the small building blocks that pupils acquire over time, allowing the curriculum intent to be achieved. There has been a legacy of some Art education being reduced to resources, focusing on a predetermined outcomes. These examples do not emphasise or connect to the broader nature of the subject. It is not offering pupils access to understand the nature of this broad, contradictory and complex subject. When children study art in school, they should be allowed to engage in practical making but also enlightened about the subject's nature. Therefore, it can be helpful to design your curriculum by considering some broader questions, the big ideas and provocations that exist in the subject. Such as: What is art? How is art made? What is art for?

Who is art for? The curriculum map or journey shows how, over time, pupils encounter and learn about these big ideas, and how over time , this builds in complexity and sophistication.” Jennifer Gibbs, HMI, Subject Lead Art & Design, Ofsted

Intent

The “Intent” of Intent, Implement, Impact, is about just that. Ofsted want to see schools asking those vital question.

AccessArt likes the ambition of schools asking themselves, “what does it mean to study art?” AccessArt has been advocating for many years that art should be taught with as much rigour and intelligence as any other subject. We spend lots of our time trying to get schools to brave up to asking those big questions – ultimately, they make art an exciting subject to teach and learn BUT, and it’s a massive, fall of the edge of the cliff BUT, many teachers are not equipped to ask nevermind answer these questions. “Art” is a very large subject with many specialisms within it, and a very finite time on the timetable. There is a temptation to fill those hour long slots with reliable (often tidy and controllable) activities, especially in schools where teacher confidence or expertise is low, but we are seeing a lot of schools who create a “curriculum plan” which in reality is just a “timetable for activity”, rather

than an intelligently thought-through creative curriculum based upon a process of identifying key concepts which might be covered. It is a HUGE ask, in the current climate, to ask of schools and teachers to take the time and investment to step back and think about the what and why.

And again, we can't stress strongly enough, this is not the teacher's fault, or through lack of willing, this is just down to the facts:

- Many teachers have never had a rich creative education themselves. Many primary teachers last picked up a pencil to draw at GCSE. Some didn't take GCSE art. Their own experience in primary of a great art education isn't always there to draw on.
- Time invested in teacher training on art is woefully inadequate. Teachers quite simply are not taught how to teach art.
- Many schools don't invest in CPD in art for their staff, leaving teachers to pay for it out of their own pocket, in their own time, or not do any at all.

So how do we enable schools to feel able to ask these questions and to really understand "intent" in an authentic and useful way?

Seek Specialist Help – Schools need help building their understanding of what art might be, in the widest sense, before they can narrow it back down

and decide what elements to teach. Teachers need help moving past fear and paralysis at getting it wrong, and into a space which reminds everyone that art is an exciting subject – it's rich, joyful, celebratory.

Ofsted want to see:

- a curriculum that is ambitious for all pupils
- a curriculum that is coherently planned and sequenced
- a curriculum that is successfully adapted, designed and developed for pupils with special educational needs and/or
- a curriculum that is broad and balanced for all pupils

https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2019/07/01/busting-the-intent-myth/?fbclid=IwAR3Lcu-aF1x4tHLcaH24M1phlz1PupsnGt0ld_Lw8HlqcyU9y69St3osg8U

(para 196-209 of the section 5 school inspection handbook).

Remember it is not Ofsted's role to tell you **WHAT** to teach (and the National Curriculum is **slim**) so there is plenty of space for you to make that decision, but Ofsted do want to see you deciding what to teach with a certain level of intelligence. They don't want to see arbitrary

lessons strung together. This is where you really need to take advice from experts (below), and not rely on guesswork.

Key organisations and people can help you see a bigger vision and build an intelligent creative curriculum (and help you define “Intent” in an authentic way):

- **AccessArt**

Our purpose is to inspire and enable high quality teaching and learning in the visual arts. We are a dynamic organisation and we are creating new resources all the time. Explore our [offer to primary schools](#) – from there you can access our [Primary Art Curriculum](#). We also run very [cost effective and high quality certified CPD](#). Join our [facebook network group](#) to be kept up to date with our resources, news and events.

- **NSEAD**

NSEAD offers many resources and certified training for teachers including their Primary Art & Design Curriculum Framework

- **Gomersal Primary School**

An [Exemplary Art Curriculum](#) led by Mandy Barrett

Invest in CPD

Ofsted is clear: if art is chosen as one of the

subjects of a deep dive, then the outcome of the inspection will reflect the judgement made upon the art curriculum. If other subjects area excel, but the art is weak, this will be reflected in the inspection report.

This should send a clear message to SLT in Primary Schools, that art should be valued as a subject area, and that the school must identify any weaknesses in the area and invest in CPD for staff. We hear too often of teachers having to pay for their own CPD because “the head has decided to prioritise other subject areas”. School leaders have the responsibility to inspire creativity and invest in this (in terms of CPD).

Implementation

Once you have begun to get to grips with answering the bigger questions about what it actually means to study art, and are beginning to be able define your intent, you will also need to think about how you implement your plans. What does art facilitation look like in your school.

In the past, a tighter curriculum often resulted in many schools making similar work – teachers would attend sessions led by local authorities around specific curriculum areas and then go back to school and run those sessions in their school. In our current age of a slim curriculum, schools are left to decide for themselves what to teach.

This is both good and bad. Experienced, passionate teachers can run with it – and amazing work happens, whilst under confident, inexperienced teachers are left not knowing what they are meant to do.

So how do YOU fill the space in between the National Curriculum and the Ofsted Framework in YOUR school? How do you implement your plans? What might inspirational learning look like in your school?

AccessArt would advise first of all acknowledging as a school what you DON'T know. Take an audit of teacher skills and experience, and if it's not up to scratch, is old and out dated or full of newly qualified inexperienced teachers, then invest in CPD. Bring your staff up to speed so they KNOW what good art teaching looks like. Don't second guess or play safe. See this as an opportunity to build an exciting creative curriculum which impacts upon many other areas of the curriculum. See below for key organisations who can help.

And if you have this sussed then share your passion and expertise. Schools that are struggling NEED to see schools that are succeeding.

Impact (and A Word or Two About Assessment)

Many inexperienced or non-specialist teachers are understandably fearful of not only how to teach for progression, but how to assess that progression: how to demonstrate it and sadly, how

to defend themselves to Ofsted. Let's take a step back, and understand a little more about what good art teaching might look like, what progression might look like, and what Ofsted might be looking for.

Many teachers assume we can apply a similar model to progression as we see in other subjects – a neatly stepped series of advances in skills and understanding – but this isn't always the case in art. No matter how some might like an orderly approach from unskilled through to "expert", this isn't the way it works in art.

A child starts their Year 1 education with a fair few creative skills – if they have been given the opportunity to hold different medium and inspired to make work then they are always more than willing to bring their inventive imaginations to the table and make art – unabashed and unapologetic. They are not "unskilled" – only inexperienced – they are exactly where they need to be, and all we need to do as educators, is provide them with as many experiences and opportunities as possible to develop their skills.

In the absence of training and experience, teachers often fall back on old, safe, but misguided preconceptions as to how to enable a child to develop creatively. Let's look at what such a preconception might look like.

A "safe" but misguided progression in drawing.

Teachers might assume “skills” are taught to children in an orderly progression. Materials are introduced at “appropriate stages”. Maybe concepts such as still life are introduced by way of artists. Or maybe children create portraits each year, so that “skills” can be seen over time. Somewhere along the line, someone decides what the “criteria for success” are. In the worst cases it might be “colours within the line”, or perhaps “has created a clearly representational drawing of a shoe.” End results are used as a way to document progress. Assessment is therefore base upon a highly restricted and a singular viewpoint. In the very worst cases summative assessment is then used to attach a grade to the work, with those who receive a lower grade being put off the subject for future years.

A questioning, explicit and highly-personal progression in drawing.

The school understands that “drawing” can be used to describe a wide range of drawing intentions, processes and outcomes. With this in mind, the teachers attempt to open minds (theirs and the pupils) as to what drawing might be, looking at drawing from a wide variety of contexts and cultures. Children are introduced to a diverse array of artists, architects, craftspeople and designers, both historical and contemporary who use drawing in many different ways, on many different scales and for many different purposes.

Children are exposed to lots of different media and drawing surfaces, and encouraged to explore working on different scales, and in collaboration as well as independently. Regular drawing practice to build skills is accompanied by drawing projects which enable experimentation and application. Personal diversion is encouraged and seen as pupils' taking ownership of their own learning. Children are encouraged right from the start to articulate their understanding and experience, and they are enabled to see differences in opinion as being valid and pertinent. Conversation takes place alongside making, in pairs, in groups, in classes. Sketchbooks are used to facilitate explorations further. Teachers use all this, in an ongoing process, as formative assessment, and use the information only to identify what is working for that pupil, and what their future creative learning needs might be.

You might guess that AccessArt advocates the second approach, and our aim is to help even non-specialist teachers feel confident (and yes, excited!) to deliver this kind of learning experience.

“Teachers should ask themselves - how do I know that children are learning what is intended? Ofsted ask schools to show how they know or talk through what assessment is telling them. In Art classrooms, formative teacher assessment is robust. Still, it can be powerful when teachers

use it to check for gaps and opportunities. Assessment allows the teacher to check what pupils are learning and how they are progressing towards the curricular goal. This type of assessment means teachers can adapt their teaching and or curriculum plan accordingly to help pupils be successful." Jennifer Gibbs, HMI, Subject Lead Art & Design, Ofsted

AccessArt would add: think less in terms of tick boxes and more in terms of your genuine curiosity as a teacher – ask yourself: “What is that child’s experience of art today?”. You aren’t collecting evidence in a defensive way – you are collecting insight to help you become a better facilitator and the child become a better learner.

Ofsted recognise both summative and formative assessment, and it is up to schools how they assess pupils in primary school. [Find out what formative assessment might look like](#), and think about how you might record that info. But when you see the word “record” make sure you are thinking about how you will record it for the benefit of the pupils and teachers NOT Ofsted.

“When asked about it [a particular issue] in an inspection, a teacher might respond “I didn’t record it but I adapted my teaching to further the learning because I identified X,Y,Z”. This use of assessment is purposeful and it potentially greater impact on pupils learning”

Jennifer Gibbs, HMI, Subject Lead Art & Design, Ofsted

Schools might use summative assessment to evaluate the curriculum offer. Take a look at these [Resonating Statements](#), for example, in this case for Drawing for end of Year 6. For example, if these statements do not resonate with children, then we need to check that we, as a school, have provided the best possible experiences for that child throughout their primary education.

Remember:

Progression is rarely linear. [Read this post here.](#)

Your curriculum plan should not be a static immovable tick box document. It is a working documents and staff should be skilled enough to be continually reassessing the creative offering to pupils. The same year group will have different needs depending upon who they are. A healthy creative curriculum is one which is able to respond and be reshaped. Ofsted will be happy to understand if you have weaknesses that you are aware of and working on. Don't be afraid to say "We are learning too".

Don't be fearful of Ofsted. Fear makes us defensive and tight. Creativity does not come from a place of tightness or defence – it comes from the opposite kind of space. If you want to be a

good art teacher, and if you want the art in your school to sing, then it needs to be joyful. Get help, skill yourself up, and then teach art with as much rigour as any other subject, but also with a sense of celebration and enjoyment.

Ofsted are not inspecting the artwork, they are inspecting your provision.

Ofsted does not tell you **WHAT** to teach, or **HOW** to teach.

Ofsted does not require a written statement of intent.

Ofsted does not advocate any particular curriculum model. A school may choose to ensure that its curriculum incorporates a particular ethos as long as it can be explained why those choices were made.

Teaching art is not like teaching any other subject. Resist pressure to shoehorn it into a shape which it doesn't quite fit. Trust your instinct if you have one, and if you don't, get some training.

AccessArt will Always Advocate:

That Art Teachers Should be Given More Guidance –
e.g. access to summary versions of exemplar curriculum plans, plus more targeted summaries of larger documents, such as a bulleted version of the Education Framework, and simple explanations

of words like “key concepts” and “end points”.

Teachers need specialist training. Jennifer Gibbs from Ofsted is clear that schools should not see art as an add on subject. Therefore SLT should not see art CPD as a luxury. Teaching art is a complex subject, though with just a small amount of training non-specialist teachers can make fantastic art teachers.

That Teaching Art is Not Like Teaching Other Subjects – and we should not be apologetic about that – we should celebrate it.

That We Need To Work Harder To Remind Schools and SLT and Government that Art is Ultimately About Creativity. We need to make the link between art and creativity more strongly; which in turn will help us understand how best to facilitate art in school.

Key Take Aways for Teachers

Each school should work towards a curriculum plan in art which works for THEIR children, based upon your (educated) understanding of what it means to those children to study art.

Being creative is a type of intelligence. Art should be taught with as much rigour as any other subject – invest in CPD.

When you create your creative curriculum plan, shape your intent, or facilitate a particular art

lesson, base it around authenticity, integrity, intelligence. Trust your instinct to know that children are naturally creative, and we just need to enable that exploration – but that we can do that intelligently and with forward planning and thinking.

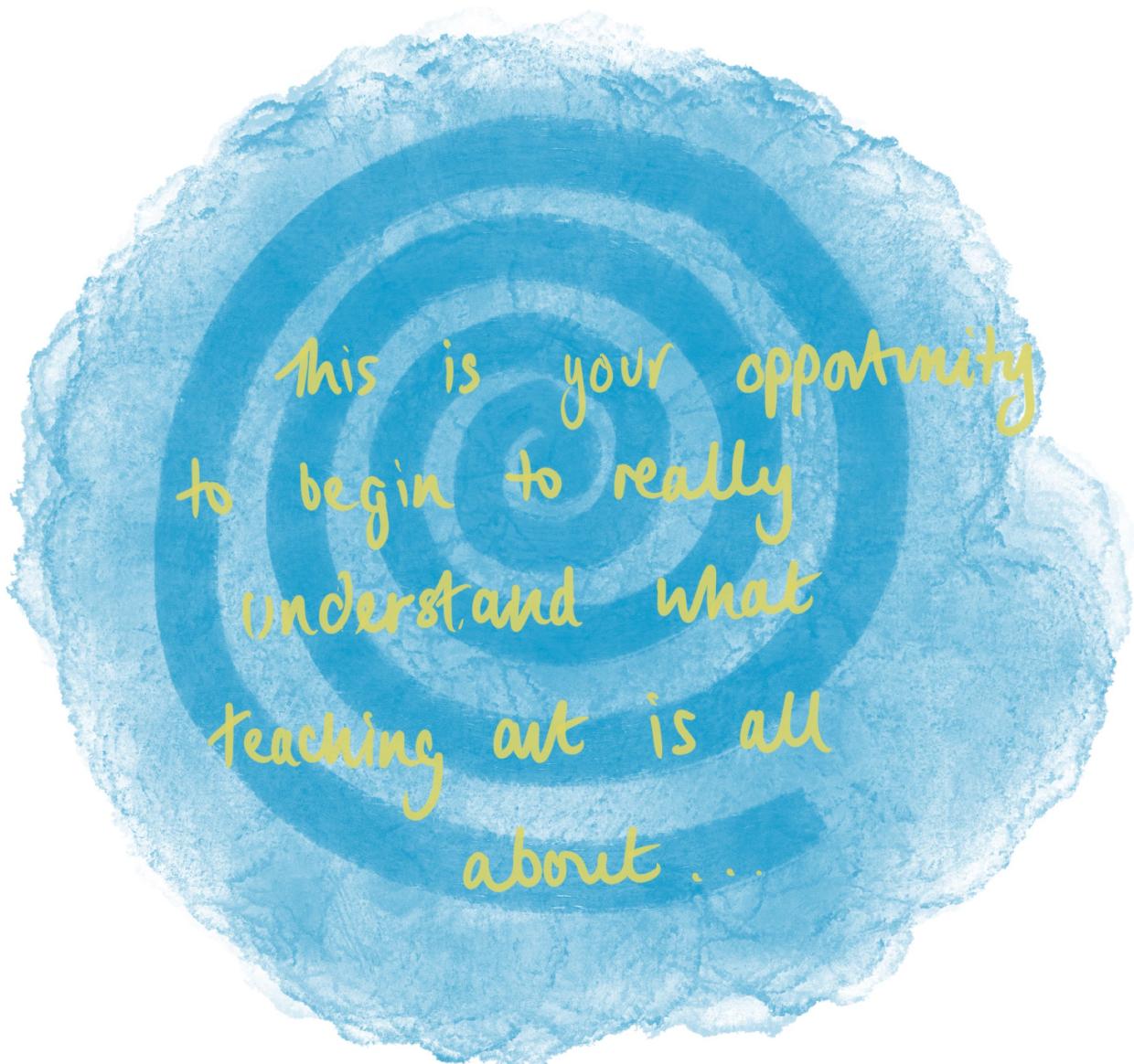
Paula Briggs, AccessArt

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AccessArt welcomes artists, educators, teachers and parents both in the UK and overseas.

We believe everyone has the right to be creative and by working together and sharing ideas we can enable everyone to reach their creative potential.

You May Also Like...



Rethinking our Approach to Assessment & Progression in Primary School

The words “assessment” and “progression” have become very loaded in recent times, and there is increasing pressure on teachers to treat art like

other curriculum areas. The reality is art is a unique subject and if we are to truly enable creativity in schools then we need to rethink our approach to assessment and progression. [Read More](#)