



Accommodation in Post-Primary Schools for Teaching and Learning in the...

Creative & Expressive

Area of Study



Executive Summary

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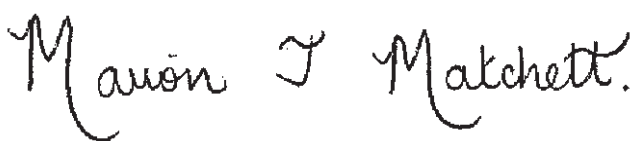
FOREWORD

Art, design, film, drama, video, music, dance and sport are areas of considerable interest and importance for most young people. The school curriculum, through the creative and expressive area of study, has a vital role in providing for pupils to experience and develop the special skills associated with appreciating and discriminating quality in these forms of activity. Moreover, the activities themselves play an important part in the life and public image of most schools. This report presents an evaluation of the physical provision in post-primary schools which supports pupils, teachers and managers in promoting activities which are fundamental in terms of enriching, and allowing expression of, aspects of human personality and intelligence and the cultural values of society.

The survey had two main components - information gathering from schools, and evaluation based on visits to a sample of schools by the Inspectorate. As a preliminary to the Inspectorate's visits, all the post-primary schools were invited to list details of the accommodation available, and to give their perspective on the quality of provision made, for the area of study. Analysis of the data informed subsequent visits by the specialist inspectors to about one-fifth of Northern Ireland's post-primary schools; these visits allowed the Inspectorate to evaluate the provision at first hand, to observe its effects on learning and teaching and to discuss the outcomes with teachers and principals.

The survey shows that many teachers work in accommodation that is inadequate. The deficiencies do not prevent dedicated staff from providing good educational experiences: indeed, the survey has identified learning and teaching of good quality in some 75% of the lessons observed. I appreciate that such high quality, in challenging circumstances, is indicative of the commitment and professional skill of the teachers involved and I place a high value on their achievements and sheer hard work. However, whilst resourcefulness and diligence can achieve much, and similarly, good, or even very good accommodation is certainly no guarantee of high achievement, the survey has found that the nature of the accommodation was an important contributory factor to motivation, breadth of experience and effective teaching and learning.

I hope that this report will be of value to all those concerned with securing improvements in accommodation and resources for this area of study so that teachers can be better facilitated to support, ever more effectively, the development, and creative and expressive growth of the young people of Northern Ireland.



Marion J Matchett (Miss)
Chief Inspector



INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s, the introduction of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) programmes of study for art and design, music and physical education at key stages (KS) 1-4, and drama at KS4, set an entitlement for pupils to a greater breadth and balance in the provision within these subjects. Media studies was confirmed as the other contributory subject within the creative and expressive area of study in KS4, and since then it has become a subject area of significant growth.

The introduction of the new programmes of study, together with emerging new interests, attitudes and expectations on the part of young people, requires teachers to review constantly how and what they teach, in order to ensure that young people's experience of learning provides relevant motivation and appropriate support for their needs. The subjects in the creative and expressive area of study are essentially practical, and require different kinds of facilities from those needed in most areas of the curriculum. Each subject has developed significantly in terms of ideas and approaches to teaching and learning. This growth has necessitated a review of existing teaching accommodation and resources to assess their influence on the quality of pupils' learning and the standards that they achieve.

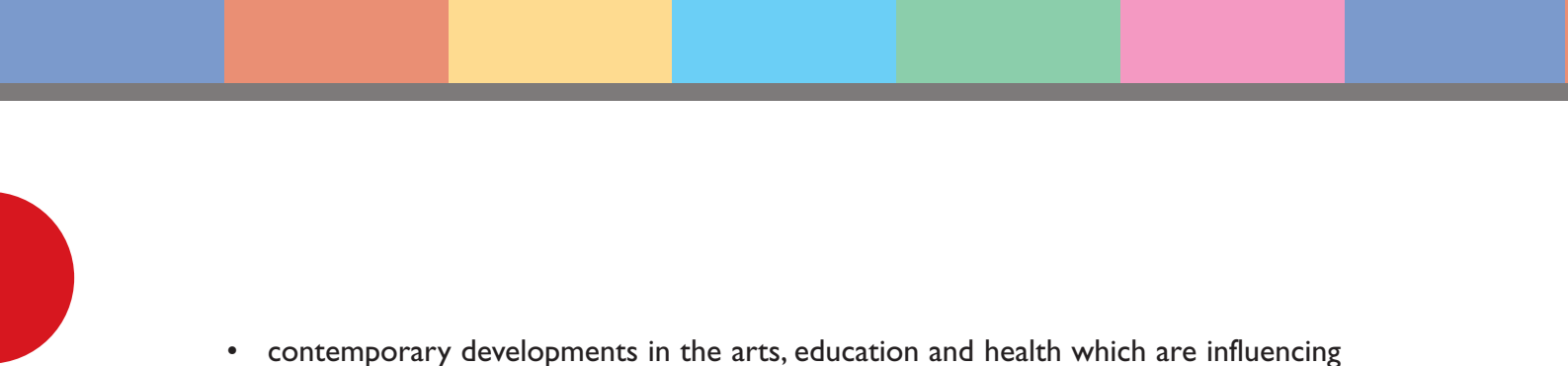
The aim of this survey was to assess the impact of the accommodation in post-primary schools on the pupils' quality of learning and standards of achievement in art and design, drama, media studies, music and physical education.

Throughout the report, specific actions are identified which DE, school authorities and ELBs should take in order to support improvement. In the Catholic Maintained sector the responsibility for the provision of school accommodation lies with the Trustees, with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools providing support in the exercising of that function. It is important that all these groups, from the perspective of their distinctive role, consider the action which it would be appropriate for them to take in the light of the findings of this report.

In June 2000, all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland were asked by the Department of Education (DE) to complete questionnaires about their accommodation for each of these subjects. Returns were received from 231 of the 238 schools, and specialist inspectors visited 99 lessons in 53 subject departments in order to observe the influence of accommodation on teaching and learning and to discuss the issue with principals, heads of department and pupils.

The findings of this survey have been set against:

- best practice in the subject as promoted by the appropriate NIC programme of study, specifications for public examinations, and DE guidance, such as the relevant booklets in the Education and Training Inspectorate's (the Inspectorate) 'Evaluating Subjects' series;

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- contemporary developments in the arts, education and health which are influencing teachers' and pupils' expectations and informing current curricular review;
 - the DE Building Handbook (the handbook) which sets out the schedule of accommodation to be provided when new building is being planned, and accompanying guidance on calculating the provision according to school size. The references in the report are to the current (1992) edition; the present review of the handbook is being influenced by these findings.

I hope that this report will be of value to all those, including DE, the Trustees and Employing authorities, concerned with securing improvements in accommodation and resources for this area of study so that teachers can be better facilitated to support, ever more effectively, the development, and creative and expressive growth of the young people of Northern Ireland.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Art and Design

1. The art and design curriculum is concerned with developing pupils' artistic potential and aesthetic sensitivity to the visual and tactile elements of the world. The pupils should have opportunities to investigate ideas and materials; and to respond through a variety of two-dimensional and three-dimensional art forms, using a range of tools and processes to realise their intentions.
2. Accommodation for art and design was good in just over 20% of schools, and a similar number of schools had more significantly good features than weaknesses. Weaknesses in the accommodation outweighed strengths in 16% of schools, but in 40% of schools the weaknesses were significant.
3. The quality of teaching was good in most of the lessons seen; in one-third it was very good. Within the considerable constraints of much of the art and design accommodation, the vast majority of art and design teachers are successful in providing a well organised, stimulating learning environment and in promoting and realising high standards of achievement on the part of the pupils. However, the inadequacy of much of the accommodation, coupled with the frequent lack of technician support, places a significant burden on teachers, in particular those working in single-teacher departments, in the organisation and implementation of the art and design curriculum.
4. The main factors which have a negative impact on teaching and learning in art and design are as follows.
 - The size and quality of accommodation which constrain the teaching of ceramics and other three-dimensional (3-D) work, printmaking, information and communication technology (ICT) and textiles.

Twenty-eight per cent of schools do not have the recommended number of art rooms; 22% have one or more non-specialist art rooms.

In only 17% of the schools do all studios meet the recommended size.

Specialist accommodation for photography is provided in 65% of the schools surveyed, but only 12% can accommodate whole-class teaching.

Such inadequacy in accommodation, reported by 71% of respondents, hinders the provision of photography within the programme of study. In about half the schools, the provision for ceramics, textiles and printmaking was inadequate and hindered the programme in art and design.

- The lack of dedicated accommodation for independent sixth form study;

Forty-three per cent of schools offer art and design at advanced (A) level. Just over half of these provide a dedicated area for sixth form pupils to undertake independent study. Inspection evidence indicates that the majority of these areas are neither designed, nor fit, for this purpose. For example, pupils may have to work in stores which are not large enough to accommodate them, or in cramped areas with insufficient natural light or ventilation. In other schools sixth form pupils occupy space in the main studio, thereby constraining the teaching at KS3 and KS4.

- The lack of technician support.

Varying amounts of technician support are provided in two-fifths of the schools.

- Insufficient storage, in particular for 3-D work and for storing pupils' work prior to examination moderation.

Almost half of the schools have the recommended number of stores. Thirty-eight per cent of schools consider equipment storage facilities to be poor; 69% regard storage for pupils' 3-D work to be poor.

- Inadequate display facilities.

Display facilities in the vast majority of schools are limited to wall display panels within the art room. The vast majority of schools do not have secure display facilities for 3-D work or sufficient space for the safe display of large scale or delicate 3-D work.

Schools should:

- undertake regular and rigorous review and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in art and design departments including the effects of inadequate accommodation;
- reflect the outcomes in departmental development planning which is agreed at senior management level.

The Department of Education should:

- revise the guidance for the provision of new art and design accommodation, in particular, in relation to facilities for:
 - work in three-dimensions, including ceramics;
 - the integration of ICT within the programme of study for art and design;
 - photography (A level study only);
 - the display of pupils' two-dimensional and three-dimensional work;
 - independent sixth form study;
 - storage for both two-dimensional and three-dimensional work.

Education and Library Boards, in conjunction with the Department of Education, should:

- devise and implement a programme for the refurbishment of inadequate accommodation for art and design;
- plan refurbishments of art and design departments in accordance with DE guidance.

Drama

1. All work in this subject should give the pupils opportunities to experience, appreciate and evaluate drama in a variety of social, historical and working contexts. The two key activities are 'Making' - creating or using dramatic forms - and 'Appraising' - applying the skills of reflection, analysis and evaluation to the process of making, in order to enhance understanding of how meaning may be expressed through the use of dramatic skills, forms and strategies.
2. The quality of drama teaching seen was always good, often very good and in some instances excellent. Where a dedicated drama room or studio was used, the subject developed a strong identity, and the quality of learning was high. However, drama is not always integrated effectively into the KS3 English programme.
3. Only 25% of schools currently have specialist accommodation for drama, and generally this consists of one space only. The accommodation is good or very good in 59% of these schools, and is very poor in 13%.
4. Specialist accommodation was not always suitable for an average-sized teaching group: groups could not work productively without unintentional interference from one another, and sometimes the pupils had to take turns to sit and watch, when the time could have been used more productively on rehearsing.
5. The handbook guidance regarding multi-purpose space for drama, lectures and small performances is frequently under-emphasised, modified or ignored with regard to provision for drama. Consequently, the facilities do not always provide satisfactorily for group work or movement; sound insulation and green room¹ provision are often poor - just under half of the schools with specialist accommodation have a green room, but often it has not been located as specified and is not fit for purpose.
6. Converted accommodation often does not match sufficiently the needs of the subject. In a number of instances, refurbishment has proceeded despite insufficient space being available.

¹ green room - A separate space used for preparation for actors' costume, make-up and props and as a waiting area for actors before and during a performance.

7. Particular aspects of specialist provision which were found to be unsatisfactory were:

- storage for costumes (50%) and props (38%);
- provision for writing (48%) and display (46%);
- the availability of mirrors (46%) and running water (35%);
- sufficient sound insulation (42%).

8. Regardless of the suitability or otherwise of these features, 83% of specialist provision, and 83% of all provision, was found to affect adversely the quality of teaching and learning in other respects. The problems which teachers reported included:

- inconvenient location of the drama room in relation to the English department;
- a lack of technical equipment;
- time which had to be spent stacking desks to provide an acting space;
- lack of space for an audience for practical performances and examinations;
- having to rehearse for practical performances or examinations in venues other than the school;
- undesirable changes to originally acceptable plans for drama/lecture provision.

9. The drama and media studies components of the programme of study for English are sufficient to support the provision of designated suites even when neither is offered as a discrete subject.

Schools, in partnership with their Education and Library Board, should:

- review the accommodation used for drama in respect of health and safety practices;
- consider ways in which teachers can receive professional development, using the expertise of the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) and Ulster Drama².

² Ulster Drama - An association of drama teachers which was formed in 1987 to promote and develop the teaching of drama in Northern Ireland. Ulster Drama is a member of the International Drama in Education Association (IDEA).



The Department of Education should:

- review the handbook guidance to:
 - specify specialist accommodation which will meet more successfully the needs of the increasing numbers of whole classes needing to use the drama space;
 - set out options which allow the main drama space to be used more flexibly for normal teaching and rehearsal purposes, while providing also the potential for performance and external examination when necessary.

Education and Library Boards, in conjunction with the Department of Education, should:

- ensure that in multi-purpose lecture/drama theatres sufficient emphasis is placed on their suitability for drama. If a school needs to provide the potential for two acting spaces for normal teaching purposes, but with the potential for one to be used as a bigger space for performance work, then this too should be available.

Media Studies

1. A key intention of the NIC is to increase pupils' versatility and confidence in communicating across a range of media and for a variety of purposes, including texts of a non-literary nature and those presented in a variety of media other than print. Media studies is a relatively new subject at examination level, but is growing in popularity, and there are increasing opportunities for its continuation in further and higher education.
2. The quality of teaching was good or very good in all of the lessons observed. Media studies is taught as a discrete subject in 48 schools, around 40 of which offer it at either KS4 or post-16. A majority (29) offer GCSE; ten schools also offer advanced subsidiary (AS) and/or A2, while five more offer the A levels only. Other courses offered include: General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate and advanced (one school), Royal Society of Arts (RSA) (one school), and non-examination classes (four schools) in either KS4 or the sixth form. At the time of writing, no schools are yet involved in work-related learning provision in drama through DE's flexibility arrangements for KS4 (Circular No 2002/3). It will be important for schools to examine this option, given the number of Institutes of Further and Higher Education (IFHEs) which are equipped to industry standards and provide a range of courses through this arrangement.
3. The small size of the sample group for media studies, and the incomplete information provided by a number of schools, meant that, statistically, many of the answers to individual questions could be interpreted in general terms only.
4. Only six schools had a specialist media studies room; of these, only three had been purpose-built; satisfactory facilities are uncommon.
5. Teachers commented on the trial-and-error process of developing suitable accommodation, given the lack of guidelines. In some more recently developed specialist accommodation a combination of heat from equipment and absence of air conditioning causes overheated rooms in which the pupils and teachers work within a stifling atmosphere. Recording work is disturbed by noisy air conditioning or inadequate insulation from intrusive bells and playground noises; to ensure a quiet environment, reasonably free from such disruption, the pupils, of necessity, complete their work outside normal school hours.

6. Thirty-four schools (70% of those offering the subject) said that the accommodation constrained the development of a range of coursework options. In the current provision, there is an imbalance in the choices available to pupils for practical work, and the result is a heavy emphasis on print journalism at the expense of radio or moving image experiences.
 - Many schools had recognised the inadvisability of housing media studies in temporary classrooms. Principals and teachers expressed concern that much of the necessary equipment was at potential risk of theft given that it was both expensive and desirable on the open market. Even in a more secure building, one school saw the need for wire mesh on the windows to deter break-ins.
 - Only five schools had Internet access in the media studies room; only seven schools had black-out facilities and only four had access to sound-proofed working areas.
 - Pupils using non-specialist rooms had difficulty working either independently or in small groups across the variety of possible media. They lacked the quietness needed to rehearse or record their work, interrupting, or being interrupted by, other pupils trying to complete their own tasks. Dedicated sound-proofed areas which had a viewing panel facilitated this type of work while ensuring that the teacher could supervise pupils effectively.
7. There was evidence linking developing specialist provision with improvement in the quality of learning and results in examinations. Nevertheless, schools with discrete facilities are finding that provision is more costly than generally anticipated. Resources need constant upgrading, and teachers need continual up-skilling to operate new equipment. It is important that due weighting is given to this factor in the allocation of departmental funding. A further key consideration is the need for dedicated technical support.

Schools should:

- seek to ensure that accommodation for media studies provides a flexible space in which young people can work creatively, productively and purposefully;
- take account of the changing nature of the requirements as improvements in technology are incorporated into new or existing specifications and as the review of the curriculum proceeds;

- consider the subject's financial requirements in terms of equipment and technical support.

The Department of Education should:

- provide guidance on accommodation for media studies, taking account of good prototypes which have been developed by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and IFHEs.

Education and Library Boards, in conjunction with the Department of Education, should:

- take steps to improve existing accommodation to meet the needs of the subject;
- develop advice and support for schools teaching, or considering the introduction of, media studies.

Music

1. The music curriculum is almost entirely practical: it comprises practising, performing, improvising and composing, and recording these activities; and listening to live and recorded musical performances and appraising them. Pupils work individually, in groups or as a whole-class, and use a wide range of musical instruments as well as the voice. The work is normally supported by specialist visiting instrumental teachers who provide individual or group tuition in musical instruments for some pupils as part of the extended curriculum. In addition, all schools have a number of choirs, orchestras, bands or smaller ensembles, sometimes initiated or run by pupils themselves. The music accommodation is often much in demand for activities outside the normal lesson timetable, and sometimes also for evening and weekend activities.
2. The quality of teaching was good in almost three-quarters of the music lessons seen, and many music departments contributed significantly to the life of the school. The accommodation was generally good in just over one-fifth of the schools; a similar number had more significantly good features than weaknesses. There were serious weaknesses in almost two-fifths of the schools, and in almost one-fifth the accommodation was very poor. There are significant differences in accommodation among the different management types, with controlled and maintained secondary schools being generally considerably worse off than grammar schools.
3. The aspects of work which teachers more often found poorly supported by their accommodation were composing, ensemble performance and using contemporary music technology - the newer components of the NIC programme of study and music examinations.
4. Thirty-nine schools have no specialist accommodation; in a further 28 the accommodation is insufficient. Ten per cent of the schools use temporary accommodation. Seventy-eight schools (37%) are one room short of the number needed to match their enrolment figure. The benefits of a large music studio are considerable; one studio should become the norm in any music suite.
5. Over half the schools lack group rooms to support normal classroom activity, including satisfactory recording of the pupils' work.

6. Almost all schools make use of visiting specialist instrumental teachers. The number of specialist teachers, and the percentage of the school's enrolment taught by them, vary considerably, but accommodation is a problem for many. One-third of all the schools have no practice/ensemble rooms and, in general, other schools have too few.
7. The primary component of the subject is sound: provision which prevents musical activities interfering with each other, and disturbing or being disturbed by other work in the school, is a paramount requirement which is often not met. Acoustic considerations need to be given a substantially higher priority in the location, construction and furnishing of music accommodation.
8. Almost two-fifths of the schools (38%) have insufficient suitable storage space.
9. Rooms are often poorly furnished to meet the needs of the subject.
10. Schools need to recognise the significant rise in the importance of music technology and give careful attention to the equipment and accommodation needed to facilitate its best use. Additional separate accommodation may be needed in some schools.

Schools should:

- review their staffing, timetabling and accommodation needs with a view to making necessary improvements;
- review the furnishing of their music rooms to create a suitable studio atmosphere;
- review the use of existing practice/ensemble rooms;
- consider the place of music technology in the curriculum and how its needs should be met.

The Department of Education should:

- review the requirements of the handbook, particularly in respect of:
 - acoustic specifications;
 - the provision of music studios;
 - accommodation for music technology;
 - the facilities for recording;
- consider the need for a building programme to provide specialist music accommodation where it is lacking.

Education and Library Boards, in conjunction with the Department of Education, should:

- take account of the disparity in provision of music accommodation in schools of different management types;
- take steps to upgrade existing accommodation, particularly in respect of group rooms and recording studios, practice/ensemble rooms and storage;
- consider the place of music technology in the curriculum in order to advise and support schools in buying and using new equipment.

Physical Education

1. The components of the physical education curriculum are athletics, dance, games, gymnastics and swimming. Extra-curricular activities are also an important aspect of school provision; a wide range of activities often complements and extends the curricular provision within schools.
2. The quality of physical education teaching was good or better in just over half of the lessons seen; a minority of the lessons were very good. The accommodation for the subject was sufficient to implement fully the requirements of the programme of study in just over a quarter of the schools. In just over one-third it was adequate but in urgent need of refurbishment, and, in the same number, inadequate accommodation prevented full implementation of the requirements of the programme of study. The range and quality of the accommodation result in considerable variation in the pupils' experiences of the subject and their standards of performance, and have repercussions on the morale of the specialist teachers.
3. Substantial improvements are needed in many schools.
 - Thirty-six per cent of schools have inadequate accommodation and cannot implement fully the requirements of the programme of study.
 - Fifteen per cent of the schools with an enrolment of 350-950 pupils, and 15% with enrolments of over 950, fall short of the number of indoor spaces for physical education recommended in the handbook. Frequently, the lack of sufficient indoor facilities leads to an unbalanced physical education programme of team games.
 - In each enrolment band there are schools which have no outdoor facilities for physical education. Fifty-five per cent of schools have outdoor facilities in poor condition and unavailable for use for long periods during the winter.
 - Forty-two per cent of schools have inadequate changing accommodation and 20% of schools have changing and showering accommodation that is in poor condition. Forty-four per cent of schools have inadequate changing facilities for the physical education teachers.
 - Forty-two per cent of schools report that they have inadequate indoor storage for physical education equipment.

- A significant majority of schools do not have accommodation to store books or ICT resources that are used for teaching and learning in physical education.
4. A serious problem in almost all schools is the number of claims on specialist indoor facilities for uses other than physical education. The assembly hall/gymnasium, in particular, is used for other school activities. Timetabling these to ensure that the pupils have sufficient allocation of time to physical education and a broad and balanced programme is exceedingly difficult. The increasing use of large school spaces for tests and examinations has become a major problem in 36% of the schools. Their use over lunch time to accommodate pupils eating packed lunches reduces further the opportunities for physical education, both for teaching and for extra-curricular activities - it also poses health and safety risks which can arise if the facilities are not cleaned adequately after such use. The large spaces also serve other school activities such as musical and dramatic productions, assemblies, parents' meetings, drama and music classes, business studies exhibitions and many more. One school reported that ten weeks of teaching space for physical education were lost each year to other activities; in another school the planned programme had been interrupted on 134.5 days between September and June.
5. The use of off-site facilities can involve high costs.

Schools should:

- review the use for other purposes of specialist physical education accommodation;
- review the allocation of time to physical education;
- review the accommodation and storage facilities allocated to examination classes in physical education;
- consider the provision of a suitable on-site facility to teach pupils how to use specialist fitness equipment, so that they can plan and develop their own programmes before using facilities at leisure centres;
- monitor regularly the teaching and learning and the standards of the pupils' achievements in physical education.

The Education and Library Boards should:

- plan refurbishments of physical education facilities, including changing facilities, in accordance with DE guidance;
- take action to improve the condition of schools' outdoor pitches and courts, including the provision of secure fencing to prevent their unauthorised use.

The Department of Education should:

- consider that the assembly hall is no longer included in the schedule of accommodation for physical education;
- consider the provision of a games hall in all post-primary schools, and also a gymnasium in schools with enrolments of over 350;
- consider, in certain circumstances, other facilities such as a fitness activity area, a dance/drama activity area, and a classroom for examination classes.

Education and Library Boards, in conjunction with the Department of Education, should:

- take urgent action to reduce the percentage of schools which fall short of the recommended accommodation for physical education.



CONCLUSION

The quality of learning and teaching was good or better in three-quarters of the lessons seen. The report indicates that many of the teachers were working in circumstances which ranged between being limiting and being very difficult. Their patience, hard work and even ingenuity were often remarkable, as they endeavoured to ensure a full range of experiences for their pupils and to encourage them to strive for high levels of achievement.

The creative nature of the subjects in this area of study presents the need for time, facilities and teaching approaches which allow the pupils to become confident in exploring, trying out and rejecting ideas, and to persevere in order to develop technical skills; the nature of the accommodation was seen to contribute considerably to the atmosphere which stimulated or discouraged their efforts. While access to good or very good accommodation did not automatically result in learning and teaching of the highest quality, pupils' restricted or imbalanced experiences were often noted when the facilities were inadequate. Evidence was also seen of improvement in the quality of pupils' work and their achievements in public examinations as they gained access to better specialist accommodation and resources.

Many departmental heads were working with equipment which needed to be repaired or upgraded, old or inadequate technology, and consumables which were presumed to last indefinitely. Many lacked the technical support they needed. Further, the subjects featured inconsistently in senior management monitoring and school development plans; and it was evident, in many of the schools visited, that they fared poorly in terms of recurrent departmental funding formulae. In most schools, however, the role of the creative and expressive area of study in developing the pupils' skills, creativity and independence was valued, and identified not only in the planned curriculum but also in the subjects' strong contribution to the general life of the school. Pupils' art work was exhibited proudly to parents, and frequently enhanced the communal areas of the school; and principals often expressed enthusiastic praise for performances by drama and music departments and the commitment of school teams.

The report draws conclusions and presents recommendations to guide schools, both at departmental and at senior management level, in reviewing contemporary developments in the arts, education, health and technology and the resources needed to meet changing requirements in the subjects. It also indicates the need to review the Building Handbook, and for urgent action to refurbish and upgrade much of the existing accommodation in this area of study. These improvements will require a high level of commitment from all concerned if schools are to ensure that all their pupils benefit from the full range of experiences and developmental opportunities to which they are entitled.





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