

Art and Design



Making the most of the new curriculum to support gifted and talented students in art and design

A definition of the gifted and talented pupil in art and design

The new secondary curriculum offers considerable scope and excellent opportunity to support those pupils identified as being gifted and talented. Gifted and talented pupils in art and design are those who: show distinctive skills in their ability to make, record and manipulate in visual and/or tactile form; have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subject area; are able to interpret, critically appraise, problem solve, take risks and develop information, materials, thoughts and ideas; and show the tenacity and ability to imagine, create and express in visual and/or tactile form in order to make a unique and original contribution to art and design.

General approaches

These pupils will gain considerably from a curriculum that gives increased emphasis to flexibility, creativity and autonomy and can be committed expressly to meet their personal needs, abilities and interests. Those identified as gifted and talented need maximum opportunity to acquire and increase their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject as a foundation for future work, and the new curriculum offers them much more opportunity to choose their materials, their methods of working, themes, subjects and projects. Important potential to reinforce good practice in this respect will come from them having opportunities to work with and observe professional art and design practitioners as well as working with committed artist teachers. Benefit will also be gained from an emphasis on increasing their knowledge of the subject, improving their critical skills and the importance being emphasised of the whole educational experience of school, with cross-curricular opportunities. Able pupils will achieve much from being able to develop a more personalised approach to the learning and should be encouraged to make more use of diaries, work and sketchbooks, portfolios, collections and personalised working spaces, including opportunities made possible by information technology. Such activities offer the prospect of further extending, exciting and stimulating the work of these pupils.

Working practice: skills

The new secondary curriculum challenges pupils to work with, and explore, the potential of different media that test their practical ability. They are also expected to consider contemporary professional practice in art and design alongside more traditional approaches. Gifted and talented pupils will respond well to being increasingly encouraged to work as artists, craftspeople and/or designers, working in the studio environments available in their schools. These areas should be designed to replicate something of a professional workplace. Studio environments, therefore, need to be organised to provide appropriate ease of access, reflect appropriately challenging contemporary practice and provide guidance to such materials and equipment, with tasks devised and set to ensure they undertake the challenges.

Exploring, investigating, analysing, creating and evaluating are key elements in the subject that need to be included in the activities in which the very able pupils engage, using various media including electronic and lens-based forms. The gifted and talented pupils will be further helped by a curriculum designed to them to make more use of their local environment, area and school – being required to find and identify places and situations significant to them, which they can observe and work from. They will benefit from activities that ask them to imagine and interpret local stories, events and themes in visual and tactile terms. With their ability and associated commitment, they should be required to find out about artists, designers and craftspeople that have some local connection and complete a portfolio on them.



Working practice: artists-in-residence

Able pupils will respond best if they can observe and experience models of professional practice by working with professional artists and designers, and craftspeople as well practising in their learning communities of artist teachers and artist learners. This will further help them acquire an appropriate level of practical competence in relevant skills, together with an active knowledge and understanding of the subject in a cultural context. They will gain most from this process of requiring them to conceptualise their knowledge and understanding in art and design through their practical work. They are more likely to understand and be stimulated by a wider range of challenging practice than the average pupil.

Working practice: knowledge and understanding

The new curriculum also requires students to increase their knowledge and understanding of the history of art, craft and design and develop a good understanding of different cultural practices, ways of interpreting ideas and methods of work, to contextualise their practice. The emphasis of the new curriculum on personalised learning, flexibility, questioning and the encouragement to forge links with the professional community beyond school provides ample scope for this approach. Able pupils need to be set tasks that require them to follow up special interests, techniques and historical aspects of art that relate to the practical activities with which they are engaged. Workshops involving teachers, artists and pupils will help in this process, with some professionals from the wider artistic community providing in-depth expertise.

Critical appraisal

Critical appraisal is an important element in the new curriculum. Pupils will become increasingly confident if they are kept well informed about the subject and how other artists and designers work. Questioning, challenging and regularly making interpretations and judgments that they can substantiate and justify should be key elements in their learning. As learners, they must be constantly involved in analysing, evaluating, challenging and contextualising their own work and that of others. Art and design activities in the broadest sense, such as graphics, film and new media, craft activities, architecture and theatre design, need to be included to increase their awareness and understanding of the range of the subject as a whole. Appropriate activities should be built into everyday practice, such as regularly requiring them to talk about their work, describe their own progress and that of their peers, and asking them to prepare short presentations about particular artists or aspects of professional practice. Group assessments at the end of sessions and sessions based on analysis and contextualisation of artists' and designers' work should be a regular feature of work for able pupils.

Whole-school activities

The most able art and design pupils from across the whole school need access to – and will benefit from – the body of knowledge and understanding that relate to the histories of the subject. They should be given guided access to the use of electronic links and media, journals and relevant literature. This is important to ensure they are kept properly informed, develop personal confidence and independence of thought and cultivate a good understanding of the subject. Visits to exhibitions, galleries and art and design studios should be a regular feature of provision. Gifted and talented pupils will be able to better demonstrate distinctive skills, knowledge and understanding if, for example, they are invited to prepare and guide their peer groups around exhibitions and displays, make short presentations about an aspect of art and design and if they are asked to devise and curate their own small exhibitions, both virtual and real.

The new secondary curriculum is firmly committed to developing the whole educational experience for all pupils, encouraging links across all curriculum areas and beyond into the professional world as a whole. This will benefit all talented and gifted pupils in the subject, and throughout the school, ensuring that the most is being made from the new curriculum. Time needs to be available to plan projects; and



activities and strategies need to be in place to ensure that the best use is made of the potential this offers for pupils throughout the school to contribute to work in art and design, as well as for the able art and design pupils to make links with other curriculum areas.

Ways of working

Different ways of working are an important part of the proposed curriculum and able pupils will benefit from the challenge implicit in organisational arrangements such as group and team activity, individual and personal work, and working beyond traditional subject barriers. Peer, mixed-ability and age groups will all provide the very able with such real challenges. Established and effective practice in art and design often involve all pupils in one set task, with projects and tasks accommodating a range of challenges for pupils of different abilities. The increased emphasis on a more personalised approach to learning reinforces the value of such an approach, with pupils expected to work at their own pace while the teacher observes their progress carefully and suggesting additional dimensions in which work may be developed. However, it is appropriate and relevant to provide specific tasks and challenges for more talented and gifted pupils both within school and as part of extra-curricular activity.

Beyond the classroom

The new curriculum values pupils being able to work outside the classroom. This approach offers scope to foster the interests and inclination of talented pupils as, working in small groups after school, they may respond more creatively and attentively to particular tasks and stimuli. Special projects can be better introduced this way, such as working alongside a professional artist or going on visits to a particular location.

Conclusion

Attention has been drawn in this section to ways of making the most of the new curriculum to support pupils identified as gifted and talented in art and design. Further information, including examples of ways of working with high ability pupils, is available on the website www.creativegeneration.org.uk. This website is concerned with all aspects of the arts.



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