

Preparing for a primary school OFSTED inspection

Wesley Till

Teacher Adviser,
Birmingham Advisory
and Support Service

Previously Deputy
Headteacher, The
Hugo Meynell CE (C)
Primary School,
Loggerheads,
Staffordshire

Abstract

This article describes how a Staffordshire primary school prepared for its first OFSTED inspection. It includes a brief outline of the inspection week and offers guidance for school management and coordinators in relation to the inspection of design and technology.

Introduction

In November 1997 the primary school which I taught at was inspected by OFSTED. Ironically, only three weeks earlier I had been offered a post with the Design and Technology advisory team in Birmingham. At the time I considered it somewhat unfortunate that I would have to undergo the inspection experience with just four weeks left at the school (couldn't it be postponed for a few weeks?). However, in looking back, I consider that being on the receiving end of OFSTED was one of the most significant (or do I mean daunting?) points of my 24-year teaching career. It is certainly an experience which I consider invaluable in my new post as a teacher adviser, in which a high proportion of my work is offering both pre- and post-OFSTED support to Birmingham primary schools.

In this article I have listed from experience *some* points which school management and design and technology coordinators may find useful in their preparation for an OFSTED inspection. Whilst I have written the article with the inspection of design and technology in mind, many points could equally relate to other aspects or subject areas. I have mainly addressed factors which may be helpful during the last minute preparation and actual time of inspection. I have not sought to list the more detailed and complex issues such as what should actually be in a subject policy and scheme of work etc.

It is recognised that proposed changes to the emphasis of the primary curriculum will subsequently affect the criteria by which OFSTED will inspect design and technology in primary schools. However, inspection teams will still report on the teaching and learning that they observe in all subjects including design and technology. Many of the comments and suggestions illustrated in this article could also be used by

coordinators as an aide memoire when auditing provision for design and technology in their school.

This article represents my personal views and experiences and not necessarily the views of Birmingham Advisory and Support Service (BASS).

General advice:

- Always remember that it is the evidence of what the inspectors see, hear and read which will influence what is written in the final inspection report.
- Start planning for OFSTED as soon as possible – make a written list of things which you will need to do.
- Read through relevant OFSTED publications that you have in school, particularly relating to current proposals to change the emphasis of the primary curriculum. Two useful publications are *Making the most of inspection and Inspection and Re-inspection of schools from September 1997*. Both are available free (details at end) and can be easily read in the bath without topping the hot water up more than once!
- If you don't have one already, start to put together a coordinator's file to include items such as management notes, minutes of meetings, school policy, scheme of work, subject guidelines (including any relating to health and safety), local and national documentation etc. If you are working to a subject action plan, then a diary showing a record of work done (e.g. courses attended, advisory support, staff meetings etc.) may prove useful.
- If you have not already done so, start to collect examples of children's work from each year, and endeavour to ensure that examples reflect a balance of work from the different aspects of the design and technology Programme of Study – e.g. work using different materials. Also make sure that you have evidence of what children have done throughout the school – especially in Years 2 and 6 (our design and technology lead inspector particularly wanted to see evidence from the end of the key stages). Don't forget

to keep children's drawings etc. which reflect the design process.

- Gathering together photographs in an album proved beneficial to us. Photos included ones of children actively involved in design and technology activities, of products which had been subsequently taken apart (e.g. from construction kits), products which had long since been taken home, and memorable evidence of food technology activities. Do label the photos with details of the content.
- Make sure that design and technology work has a high profile in displays around school – including areas such as classrooms, corridors, entrance hall, etc. Label work with a clear explanation of what aspect of the National Curriculum the work covers. Ensure that there is a balance of work using different materials. We put up a wall display in the room used by the inspectors for their meetings – they couldn't help but notice this, and reference was made to it in their final report.
- Get copies of recent OFSTED reports from other schools – have a look at what aspects received both good and not so good comments.
- Be open minded when listening to the usual range of tales about OFSTED experiences.
- If your LEA has advisory staff for design and technology, then do seek their advice if possible.

The last few weeks:

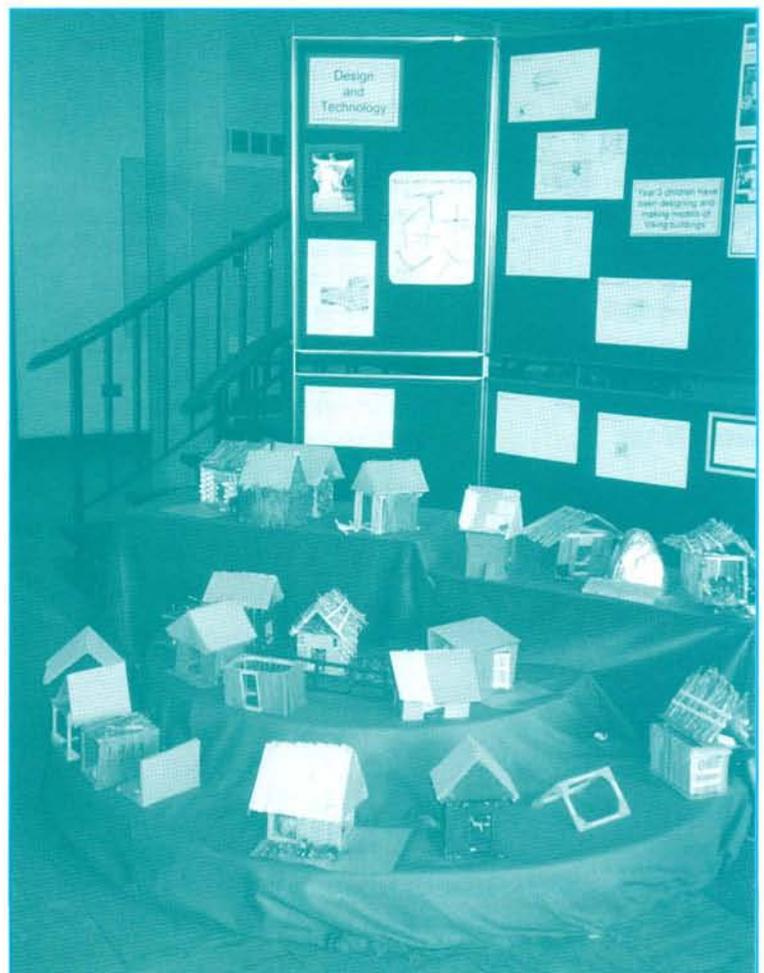
The big build up for us came at the start of the new school year in September 1997 when we obviously approached all of our termly and yearly planning and preparation with OFSTED in mind. The first deadline which we had to meet was to get all of our documentation ready for the Registered Inspector to take away during the third week of September.

- The team will request documentation for the different subjects. We made sure that it was well presented in folders, and that photocopies were of a high standard. You may have a school format, but in each subject folder we put

a title page, policy, scheme of work and any other items of information which we wanted them to know about the subject. As the subject documentation is sent to the different inspectors who will have responsibility for separate subjects/aspects it may be worth putting it into individual folders.

- Start to collect specific resources and paperwork etc. which you will need for each lesson. To store them I collected several photocopier paper box lids – marked them for each lesson – and during the week beforehand started to photocopy worksheets etc.
- If you are able to con or bribe someone from outside school to help you with preparations then do so. Jane (a kind hearted mother from my class) helped me put some stunning displays up. Being a teacher (and a very artistic one as well) she was able to see things from a less stressed viewpoint as well as providing the all-important extra pair of hands.

Make sure that design and technology has a high profile around school. Use of notice boards and covered stage blocks provided space for displaying a clearly labelled selection of work from all year groups.



Lesson plans:

It is likely that your school will have a set format for the lesson plans. Ours was based on one suggested by the local LEA inspector.

- Make sure that individual lesson plans are very detailed and clearly show the intended learning objectives for the children (learning objectives are not the same as activities). If possible word process the lesson plans so that any minor alterations can quickly be made. Using the PC also ensures that the plans can be read easily, and you can probably get more information on them.
- Our lessons (which received highest recognition) included a clear introduction in which children were informed of the lesson objectives, had a clear structure, and also had a "plenary" at the end when children had an opportunity to show what they done and learnt.

During the inspection week:

Keep remembering that it is the evidence of what the inspectors see, hear and read which will influence what is written in the final inspection report.

- At the start of the inspection week you can usually request that specific lessons are observed. I asked specifically for two lessons to be observed, including a design and technology lesson (being cynical you could say that if they come and see your design and technology lesson – then they will miss observing you teaching something else!). The main

reason was because several of my colleagues tended to organise design and technology for Thursday and Friday afternoons – not too useful when the observational part of our inspection was due to finish on Thursday lunchtime!

- Don't be afraid to use regular adult support to help with practical lessons. In our case the use of grandparents, parents and governors for design and technology support received positive comment.
- When being observed, don't be afraid to let the children be their normal independent selves in collecting resources etc. In panic I myself spent time giving out worksheets – sadly this was not approved of!

The coordinator's interview:

The coordinator's interview or discussion is the main opportunity for coordinators to sell their subject or aspect. It is important that you take copies of subject documentation and an organised coordinator's file would prove useful for this. If possible arrange for the meeting to be in an area where you have a lot of design and technology work available – if not, then get some examples boxed up ready to move.

Your inspection team may give you a list of the areas for discussion beforehand. Your LEA advisory service may also provide advice on likely areas. I have written the questions which we were asked, and as you will see these are generic and can be applied to other subjects or aspects. This list is not definitive and other possible questions should be considered.

How, why and when did you become the coordinator?

What is your role as coordinator? How do you allocate time to the different aspects?

What do you perceive as your successes to date?

How was the policy for your subject/aspect formulated?

What are your plans for the subject/aspect? How were targets

Consider health and safety issues particularly with food related activities. Prior to this cake making activity the tables had been covered with plastic sheet which in turn had been wiped with sterilising fluid.



prioritised? How do they relate to the School Development Plan?

How is the subject/aspect funded? How is funding agreed and spending decisions made? Are the resources adequate?

How does the school plan coverage of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study, ensuring continuity and progression?

How does the subject contribute to spiritual, moral, social and cultural education?

What are the procedures for assessment, recording and reporting (including teacher assessment, baseline and standardised testing, if any)?

How does the school moderate teacher assessments?

How do you use assessment information?

What arrangements are in place for liaison within and between key stages?

What arrangements are in place for supporting children with special educational needs?

How have you provided support and guidance to colleagues or information to governors?

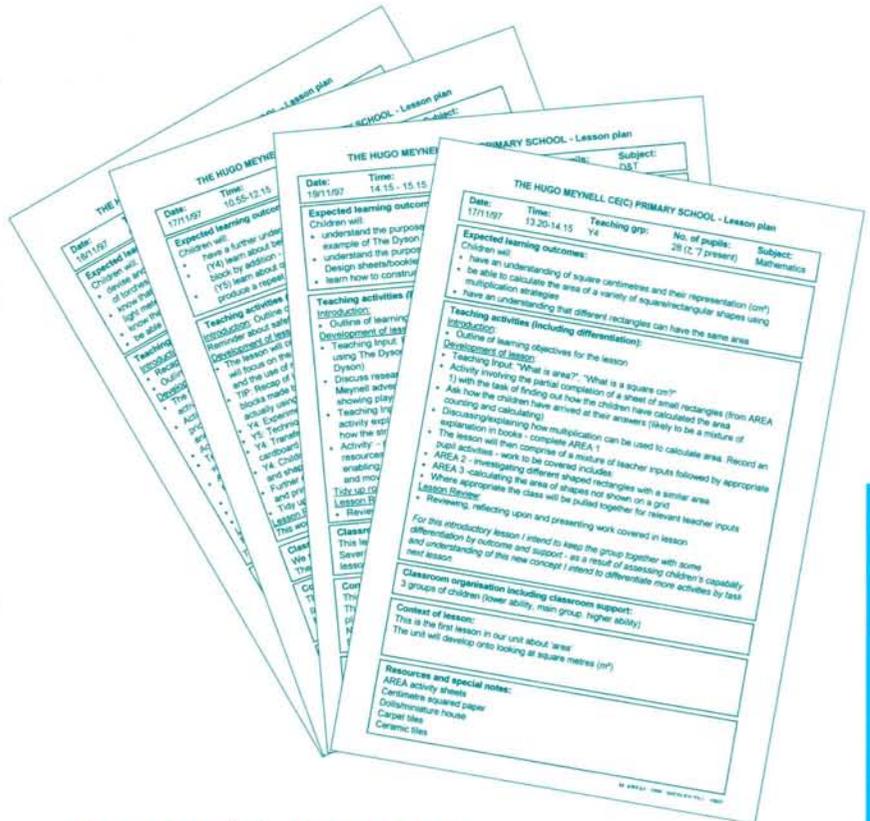
How do you monitor the subject/aspect and how do you use the information obtained?

Is there any other information you would like to add to the above?

- If with hindsight after the meeting you think that you missed something important out, or have not answered a question fully, then request an opportunity to give the missing information as soon as possible.

Immediately afterwards:

- This is a very obvious one! Like most people we indulged in a well earned combination of relief, alcohol, jubilation, rest and sleep. The anti-climax can affect people in different ways, but with the imminent onset of Christmas (and for



Ensure that individual lesson plans are detailed and clearly show information including: intended learning objectives; teaching activities; classroom organisation; context of lesson; a list of resources.

me – leaving) we were all kept very busy.

- If you have not already done so, do take photographs of the school around the inspection time. It is unlikely that it will have been so tidy for some time, and whilst the phrase “we must keep it like this” will no doubt be heard – we all know the reality!

The final report:

- Do celebrate achievements that have been identified!
- Try not to take critical comments personally.
- The school governors are required to produce an action plan within 40 working days to show how the key points of the report will be addressed. If any involve your subjects your headteacher should hopefully involve you in the formulation of such points.

- If appropriate, and if possible, do try and involve advisory staff from your LEA. They will have experience of supporting schools in similar situations to yours.

Finally, and as stated previously, remember that the final report will be based on the evidence that the inspectors observe, read and hear. Although they should be observant, they are not telepathic, so as coordinator make sure that they see and are made aware about your subject. *Sell it!*

PS: In January we were delighted that design and technology was identified in the OFSTED Report as being "a strength of the school". My sincere thanks go to Steve Robinson (Headteacher), governors, staff, parents and pupils at The Hugo Meynell CE(C) Primary School for their hard work in putting design and technology firmly onto the school's curriculum framework.

References

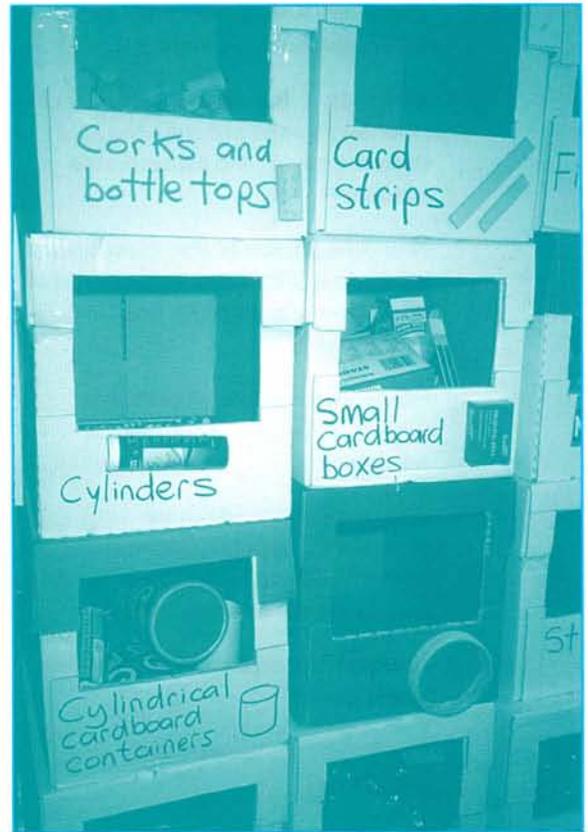
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OFSTED (1997) Inspection and re-inspection of schools from September 1997 August 1997

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Make sure that resources are clearly labelled. The main school storage system for reclaimed materials uses adapted photocopier paper boxes.



Don't be afraid to use regular adult support to assist with lessons. Ted (a Granddad) is seen discussing with Isobel the progress of her Viking building.