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23 November 2010

Mrs H Storey
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Dear Mrs Storey

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 9 and 10 November 2010 to look at work in art, craft and design.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual schools will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons, including a joint observation with you.

The overall effectiveness of art, craft and design is satisfactory with good features.

Achievement in art, craft and design

Students' achievement in art, craft and design is satisfactory with good features.

- In Years 7 to 9, students make satisfactory progress from low starting points. Baseline and continuous assessments indicate that boys and girls improve their confidence and competence, particularly in drawing. However, limited refinement of skills across two- and three-dimensional media, and depth of understanding about artists, craftworkers and designers constrains achievement. Work that capitalises on students' own experiences and interest in identity is higher quality, for example personal boxes inspired by the work of Joseph Cornell and individual journals. Students are keen to create but not all of them listen attentively enough.

- Increasing numbers of boys and girls choose to take the fine art examination and interest in pursuing wider opportunities such as photography, is growing. Students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress well, although boys' performance is inconsistent. In 2009 all groups achieved above average GCSE results. Painting, drawing and digital media are used skilfully. Students make effective use of other artists' work, including that experienced through gallery visits. They enjoy their work in the subject. Decision making skills advance, but direct observation and experimentation are underused.
- Students develop a strong commitment to the subject in the sixth form. Achievement at both AS and A level is variable but includes work by established students and newcomers to the school that is highly creative and personalised. Sketchbooks indicate that students are able to interrogate and interpret different artists' work; but their understanding about challenging concepts used historically, or in the contemporary world is not always explicit, for example through annotation. Not all students show confidence in reaching far beyond their comfort zone, but those who progress to related courses get positive feedback about their readiness.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

The quality of teaching of art, craft and design is satisfactory with good features.

- Staff use their subject knowledge adequately to inform lesson planning and their dialogue with pupils. However, when their experience as artists is also explicit, for example through sharing their sketchbooks, demonstrating techniques or preparing visually striking PowerPoint slides, their impact on students' curiosity and productivity is immediate. Teaching that uses strong visual communication enables all students, including the profoundly deaf students, to integrate well and develop independence in their learning. The lessons observed were predominantly good. However, some lessons rely on secondary sources at the expense of direct observation or handling. The modest scale of work and range of media also limit opportunities for students to respond to physical challenge.
- Students are given particularly clear guidance about how to meet assessment objectives on examination courses. The structure contributes to the good progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the pace of learning for more able students could be accelerated by interspersing the pattern of lessons with additional foci in order to increase the proportion of A* grades. Although the work of individual students is shared sensitively during lessons, displays are not fully exploited as a teaching tool, for example by modelling annotation. Exemplar levels of drawing used in Years 7 to 9 contribute to students' accuracy when evaluating their own and other students' drawing.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

The quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design is satisfactory with good features.

- The curriculum provides opportunities for students in Years 7 to 9 to encounter a wide range of media. However, planned progression of skills, knowledge and understanding through structured revisitation, is limited. The depth of work developed in Year 10 and thereafter is predominantly restricted to two-dimensional media. The successful integration of digital media shows that when opportunities are widened, students' creativity flourishes while existing skills still refine. The focus on developing the craft of drawing and painting enables students to express sophisticated ideas very effectively. Nevertheless, bold experimentation that enables students to learn how to capitalise on the unexpected is less evident. The school is planning to introduce a wider range of accreditation in the subject to meet the needs of students ready to specialise or pursue a vocational interest.
- In line with the media encountered by students, their knowledge and understanding of artists, craftworkers and designers from different times and places is restricted to predominantly fine art. However, in Years 10 to 11 and in the sixth form, students' progress is accelerated by their direct experience of galleries, often including workshops with practising artists. A small number of sixth formers also join life-drawing classes offered elsewhere. In Years 7 to 9 there are missed opportunities to integrate more first-hand experiences, for example by making reference to the art, sculpture and architecture contained in the school and local community. Exhibition work by older students is used annually to inspire younger students, but the gallery space within the department is underused as a continuous inspiration and resource for students across the curriculum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

The leadership and management of art, craft and design are satisfactory with good features.

- Networking with subject specialists in other schools, with gallery educators and creative practitioners, is used constructively to inform subject policy and enrich provision, including teaching. The views of students are taken into account when planning schemes. However, the diverse ideas and expertise of individual staff are not generally reflected in the range of students' experiences or level of innovation promoted through distributed leadership. Teamwork in response to national initiatives, for example the campaign for drawing or the arts award, is underdeveloped.
- The subject leader has managed the move to new accommodation efficiently, for example using the opportunity to improve computer resources, but at some expense to craft processes. The department is developing a distinctive ethos within the school that is valued by students due to the balance between support, guidance and promoting students' independence. A track record that includes years when all groups of students achieve well provides a secure basis for further improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- Ensure that different groups of students achieve consistently well by:

- widening the range of accreditation in the subject
 - broadening students' knowledge and deepening their understanding particularly about contemporary craft makers and designers
 - promoting progression, particularly students' confidence in using three-dimensional media
 - increasing first-hand experience of art, craft and design, including earlier use of galleries and work directly from stimuli
- Increase the impact of subject leadership by:
- working as a team to share and spread best practice, for example in the use of assessment, use of PowerPoint or demonstration
 - agreeing a shared vision for future subject development and defining the roles and responsibilities of staff in transforming policy into practice
 - developing the gallery space in school, for example involving students actively in curating exhibitions
 - focusing monitoring and evaluation on participation and performance by different student groups in lessons and over time.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design at the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector