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Mr P Woodman
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Dear Mr Woodman

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of staff and students, during my visit with Ian Middleton HMI on 20 and 21 October 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 institutions 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 13 lessons, including joint observations with the subject leader and a member of the senior leadership team.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

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

- Students make good progress in Key Stage 3. They build a good base of skills in handling materials and enjoy exploring the creative practice of other artists. Their progress in learning to evaluate their work is slower, so that ideas are not always developed fully. This notably affects boys who opt to study the subject in lower than expected numbers at Key Stage 4.
- Progress at Key Stage 4 is good for boys and girls. It is strongest on GCSE courses and satisfactory, but gaining momentum, on the non-examined enrichment Year 9 course. Students develop well their skills in handling materials so as to generate and visually represent ideas. Where they have

a clear understanding of the context and purpose for their work, they make outstanding progress and overall attainment is high by the end of Year 11. As with younger students, some are uncertain about the purpose or direction of their work which hinders them in reflecting on the progress made and defining what the next steps are.

- In the sixth form, students flourish and their progress and attainment are outstanding. Across a good range of courses they learn to make personally meaningful work which exploits fully the earlier stages in their learning. They thoroughly enjoy what they do, showing sensitivity to the materials used and incorporating skilfully the influences from the other artists and cultures they learn about. Although their work is exhibited in school, their potential as role-models for younger students is underused.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teachers have good subject expertise and work hard to prepare projects and lessons. They have strengths in their knowledge of the work of other artists and use this well to support students, especially in the sixth form.
- Lessons are well managed, including the organisation of materials, visual resources and time so that there is a lively engagement with learning. Relationships with students are good and their behaviour is managed effectively in most lessons.
- Students' learning is structured carefully over time. Teachers are vigilant in checking that they complete project stages so as to support their learning.
- Monitoring students' attainment and progress to targets are good. There are particular strengths on GCSE courses and in the sixth form, where any underachievement is identified and tackled. The assessment of students' progress is good in Key Stage 3, albeit with a lack of clarity on the Year 9 enrichment course about how students' progression is measured.
- Most lessons are planned well to support students of varied ability. The best teaching, most evident in the sixth form, includes highly individual support for students. This is a feature of the better teaching in younger years. However, some opportunities are missed to help students of differing abilities to understand the features of successful work or how to use course assessment criteria to help them decide how to move their work on. For example, questioning and practical tasks are not always targeted in response to what is known about different students' creative potential.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum effectively develops students' understanding of visual elements such as line and colour through study of an interesting

range of themes. They encounter a good variety of two-dimensional processes, including using computers. However, they have too few opportunities to work in three-dimensions, and this is a factor in fewer boys than girls opting for the subject at Key Stage 4.

- There is a wide range of study options in the three-year Key Stage 4. Students enjoy the opportunity to do ceramics as a specialist area. Since its introduction two years ago, a non-examined Year 9 course has also proved popular. Schemes of work at Key Stage 4 rightly move students towards taking responsibility for their work through increasingly personal responses to the starting points set.
- Outstanding breadth of specialist study areas in the sixth form underpins the students' achievement. They respond very well to the starting points set, with technical input by teachers carefully structured to give students the means to express themselves, while challenging them to use it.
- Students at all ages have good opportunities to learn from the work of other artists, craftworkers and designers. These make a significant impact for sixth formers, who usually visit a number of galleries and museums. For younger students, there is too little direct contact with artwork or artists at work, including in the local area, so as to inform their learning and broaden their experience.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- Subject leadership is dedicated and hardworking. It has a good track record of consolidating and enhancing provision despite some discontinuity in teaching as a result of extended leave periods among staff.
- Staff teamwork is good, for example in sharing resources and reflecting thoughtfully on how to develop projects further. Staff are valued as creative practitioners and given the necessary freedom to plan their work to develop ownership of what they are doing.
- Subject monitoring exploits a good range of lesson observation, analysis of assessment data and work scrutiny to focus development plans. Current priorities aim appropriately at improving boys' participation, and link to school-wide initiatives such as promoting students' thinking skills. Nevertheless, it is not always clear how actions intended to bring about change are to be implemented, and monitoring strategies sometimes lack precision in checking the impact made.
- In some respects, subject provision is enhanced well through connections made outside the school. For example, staff keep abreast of exhibitions in London. Other opportunities, such as using local collections and artists are missed in adding to the quality of provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving progress, especially at Key Stage 3, by ensuring students fully understand the features of good work so that they can be more independent in deciding what to do next and how to reach their long-term targets
- widening the curriculum to broaden students' learning by including more three-dimensional work for younger students and more direct experience of artwork and artists at work, including in the local area
- increasing the impact of subject leadership by ensuring actions to bring about improvement are always tightly focused and linked clearly to the monitoring strategies intended to check if they are working.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design in 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

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector