

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr D New
Headteacher
Nailsea School
Mizzymeade Road
Nailsea
Bristol
BS48 2HN

Dear Mr New

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit with Judith Rundle HMI on 16 and 18 November 2010 to look at work in art, craft and design, and PE.

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 nine part-lessons in art, craft and design and nine in PE.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Pupils' achievement in art, craft and design is good.

- Students' personal and creative development through the subject is a strong feature of achievement. Boys and girls build the confidence to express highly personalised insights, feelings and ideas through two- and three-dimensional and digital media as they progress through the school. Individual work is stronger than group work, particularly early on. Students find the subject increasingly rewarding and challenging; an above-average proportion take an examination in the subject and achieve well in relation to their other subjects. Those who progress through to the sixth form flourish as young artists and are able to explain their work convincingly, which is an area of inconsistency earlier on due to students' variable use of written analysis and annotation. The use of film reveals the depth of their work.

- Key subject skills, such as drawing, develop well for students of all abilities because the use of a wide range of approaches and drawing media promotes striking work, which builds students' confidence. For example, mono-printed line drawing is used in all key stages. Mark-making contributes to students' bold use of graphic media, for example when students interpret observations of Chepstow castle in Year 7. Their exploration of ideas for three-dimensional work at GCSE shows that students are able to combine control and creativity when using drawing for different purposes. Sixth formers are able to select from a repertoire of techniques, at best working experimentally, sensitively and speedily to stimulate a fast flow of ideas.
- Progress in the use of digital media accelerates quickly as students learn how to apply their skills. Although some students could exploit their prior experience of digital media more when they start at the school, they develop their skills well on examination courses such as the BTEC media course and more recently the GCSE photography course. Students learn to communicate visually and particularly powerfully when underpinned by their clear understanding of the visual elements and interpretation of creative practitioners' use of digital media. Students' use of other artists' work to influence their own is discerning across all media, including the use of traditional techniques. For example a Year 10 group observed had explored a range of painters to use selectively in refining their own work.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Students look forward to the lessons made distinctive through the emphasis on visual communication. The pace of learning starts slowly where listening or writing is emphasised but accelerates where time-limited tasks or practical enquiry predominates. The most challenging teaching stretches students intellectually through skilful reference to contemporary practitioners' work which stimulates their creativity and need to explore and refine particular making skills in order to communicate effectively; this is a particular strength of sixth form teaching. Teachers' subject knowledge is refreshed continuously and used thoughtfully to connect with students' developing maturity and interests.
- Although the quality of teaching is good overall the range is wide, made evident on the visit and through monitoring records. For example, some assessment is exemplary, using marking to endorse, question or inform students about precise aspects of their work; this contrasts with regular but less critical, useful or specific feedback. Planning to meet students' individual needs is also inconsistent; the best not only indicates an awareness of students' abilities but different strategies to develop them. A successful approach uses experimentation to diagnose students' understanding and skills. Staff are starting to spread best practice by using their open plan environment to team-teach more often, including innovative work across year groups.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- A clear subject overview across all key stages shows that students' preferences and progression are embraced well when planning courses. Opportunities to specialise and gain accreditation in two- and three-dimensional and digital media offer students varied choices. Overall, wide-ranging opportunities for students to learn about art, craft and design are created at different times and in different places. These include strategic use of examination work to inspire younger students, and thoughtfully selected visits to art galleries and museums to enable students taking an examination to experience inspiring and contentious work first-hand. Students appreciate the display of exhibitions updates.
- Links between students' experiences in the subject and their wider learning are promoted well. For example, the Year 7 critical skills course promotes students' visual literacy. Projects that explore the public dimension of the subject are used effectively to generate curriculum innovation. For example, local connections made through the design and construction of an impressive sculpture representing the transition from old to new school inspired students' creative use of words, images and space. An interactive exhibition of students' work also showed the potential of the inspiring buildings as a gallery space, integral to learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- Good capacity for improvement is indicated by a strong and well-informed vision for the subject supported by an established track record within the faculty. Although there are unrealised opportunities to promote and evaluate qualities of particular value across the arts, whole-school professional development is proving effective in promoting continuity in students' learning. The move to new accommodation and staff restructuring have been managed creatively. The specialist technology and media arts subjects have a significant and positive impact on the subject. For example, professional quality resources have helped turn sound policy into inclusive and relevant practice by modernising and widening opportunities.
- Monitoring of students' progress in school is sound, indicated by consistently good attainment in relation to their other subjects. However, fluctuations in GCSE performance between years and courses in relation to national trends, indicates that additional strategies are required to ensure that students' achievements are explicit in satisfying examination criteria. The subject leader provides a role model of confident, creative and self-critical teaching that is mirrored by the responses of students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students' examination results consistently match the quality of their thinking and making, by explicitly satisfying assessment objectives
- addressing inconsistencies in the quality and impact of teaching, by exploiting opportunities for students and staff to work collaboratively
- communicating subject vision across the school and wider community, by involving all in the development and use of the school as a gallery.

PE

The overall effectiveness of PE is good with outstanding features.

Achievement in PE

Achievement in PE is good.

- Attainment is consistently above average in all age groups and in examination courses. Work seen during the inspection indicates that pockets of sixth form and GCSE practical activities are significantly above average. A good number of individual students and teams attain success at District and National levels.
- Students make good progress in their learning because of the quality of teaching, and school data indicates that the rate of progress is improving steadily. Students learn new skills at a good pace and have good knowledge and understanding of a broad range of activities. Boys explain and display accuracy in their tackling and rucking skills in rugby and girls develop their understanding of teamwork and communication well. Most students show good levels of fitness and persevere to improve their work. They have well-developed skills in observation, evaluation and feedback to improve each other's performances.
- The vast majority of students spoken to have positive attitudes towards the subject and enjoy PE lessons. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary and students appreciate the broad range of opportunities provided for them. Students are able to work independently and in small groups equally well. The PE team acknowledges that evaluation and feedback from students is an area for further development.
- Students' leadership roles are a strength within PE. All students have good opportunities to develop their leadership skills through taking different roles in lessons and older students achieve extremely well as young organisers, sports leaders and ambassadors. They work well with younger students and primary pupils, developing their confidence to adapt to different situations swiftly.

Quality of teaching in PE

The quality of teaching in PE is good.

- Staff have high expectations of students' participation as performers, by contributing verbal input and in taking a variety of roles. Planning is thorough because staff know students and their abilities well. This results in work, resources and grouping being carefully matched to meet the needs of students with different abilities. However some inconsistency exists in the expectation of students to work at maximum levels of intensity during a lesson.
- Lessons include a broad range of teaching methods to motivate, stimulate and engage students in learning. Good use is made of demonstrations so that students know what they are aiming to achieve. Students have good opportunities to find their own solutions to tasks, and to undertake peer and self-assessment; enough time is allocated for them to practise, refine and consolidate their skills before moving to the next task. More experienced staff have excellent question and answer techniques to extend students' thinking skills and initial responses. Occasionally the pace of lessons drops when teachers talk for too long and students become inactive for extended periods of time. All teachers use praise well to remind students of learning objectives and to highlight the reasons why they are being successful. In the most effective plenary sessions students evaluate their work and set the learning objectives for the next lesson.
- Assessment procedures are good overall; peer- and self-assessment by students are a particular strength. Students in Key Stage 3 and examination classes know how well they are doing and their next steps in learning because of comprehensive verbal feedback in lessons and useful comments in marking. Students in core Key Stage 4 lessons are less secure about their learning, progress and how to improve further.
- Targets are ambitious with good procedures for monitoring and intervening when students are identified as underachieving. Occasionally in lessons there is not enough intervention across the full range of abilities, especially the lower ability level, to help them improve.

Quality of the curriculum in PE

The quality of the PE curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced in Key Stages 3 and 4 and has been adapted swiftly to meet the expectations of the new National Curriculum. A good length of time to study an activity in depth is allocated to units of work in Key Stage 3. Although core Key Stage 4 has one strand with extended units of work, the other option lesson does not allow students to maintain the progress that they are used to. The range of examination and accreditation courses has increased in recent years with the introduction of BTEC sport and more leadership qualifications. Plans are being finalised for a football academy which will extend opportunities further.
- Students in Key Stage 3 meet the expectation for two hours of PE in the curriculum but students in Key Stage 4, following only a core PE programme, fall below this. An above-average number of students take a GCSE or BTEC course and attend extra-curricular activities, but a small

proportion of Key Stage 4 students do not meet the expectation for two hours of PE and school sport each week. The PE team and school sport coordinator are aware of this and have introduced a number of additional opportunities, such as girls-only rugby and football, to try and encourage wider participation.

- A high proportion of students attend the good extra-curricular and enrichment programme and good plans are in place to increase the range of non-traditional activities following students' feedback, including boxercise. Reluctant participants are not identified and targeted for engagement. A range of inter-house competitions is available throughout the year. Good links have been created with local sports clubs, with students identified as contact points for their peers, to enhance opportunities for expert coaching and use of external facilities.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in PE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in PE is outstanding.

- The combination of faculty and subject leader is extremely strong. This leads to a cohesive, ambitious and driven team with a determination to seek out and provide the best opportunities for students. A secure and well-organised programme of monitoring and evaluation activities enables leaders to have an accurate view of the teams' work and to set clear priorities for improvement. The opportunities to share practice are quickly bringing about greater consistency in high-quality teaching and student experiences, and subsequently in improving student achievement.
- The PE taster day for primary pupils is a highly successful innovation to support the move from primary to secondary PE. It is being exploited fully to assess pupils' abilities, to identify gifted and talented pupils and to moderate judgements between primary and secondary school staff.
- PE has a high profile around the school with excellent facilities and resources. Occasionally, there is an imbalance of genders in images and displays.
- Impact of the school sport partnership is significant for students through additional opportunities for participation, competition and leadership. Additional funds have been obtained to extend the opportunities for specialist coaching and equipment. Equally, the schools' specialist status in technology has enabled the PE team to purchase information and communication technology, although the use of a movement analysis package is yet to be embedded fully into lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the core Key Stage 4 option lesson to better match students' needs and interests, and exploring ways to increase the number of students in Key Stage 4 engaged in two hours of PE and school sport each week
- increasing the opportunities for students to evaluate and feed back on PE provision

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector