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Mr P Nicholson
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Dear Mr Nicholson

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 on 10 and 11 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 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 seven 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.

Achievement in art, craft and design

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

- From average overall starting points, students make good progress in Key Stage 3 and attainment is above average by the end of Year 9. They develop good skills in handling materials and processes, including drawing. Students value learning about other creative practitioners' work, making good use of what they find in supporting their own creative practice.
- At GCSE level, the subject is a popular choice with boys and girls. Students make outstanding progress toward GCSE targets and overall attainment is high by the end of Year 11. Many students choose to study the subject at advanced level. Students' work features increasingly ambitious personal ideas, often explored through drawing and painting in final examinations.

- Most students enjoy the subject, contributing to typically productive lessons. Their behaviour is outstanding, as evident in the sharing of tools and in the eagerness with which the majority of students settle to their work. Many come back into the subject rooms at breaks or after school to extend their activities.
- Where the pace of learning is slower, notably in Key Stage 3 lessons, this is due to students' occasional uncertainty about the purpose of what they are doing and the features of successful work. This reduces their ability to reflect on what they are doing and how to improve it.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Subject staff are enthusiastic and very hardworking. They put much effort into preparing ideas and resources for lessons. Relationships between staff and students are positive and their behaviour is managed well.
- Strong subject knowledge means teachers' demonstrations of technique, and introductions to the work of other artists, are valuable. Resources, including time, are managed skilfully in most lessons, with good classroom organisation helping students understand the importance of caring for their workplace and their equipment.
- The most effective lessons are planned carefully around the needs of individual students, with a very clear focus on the goals to be achieved. Support for GCSE students, often including extra after-school sessions, epitomises this approach and contributes to their rapid progress.
- In day-to-day teaching, particularly of younger students, some planning is less sharply focused on meeting individual students' needs and clarifying the purpose of learning. Discussions at the start of lessons do not always communicate fully the practical or aesthetic purpose of the forthcoming work. Practical tasks, and teachers' questioning, are sometimes not varied enough to meet students' differing needs and challenge them fully.
- Students' progress is monitored carefully over time. Feedback from staff is regular and useful, with students especially valuing their discussions with staff. While there is scope to relate more closely to National Curriculum level criteria when feeding back to Key Stage 3 students, monitoring older students' progress toward GCSE targets is used very well to trigger precise guidance and support.
- The use of homework is good. It is well planned to complement in-class learning. Students make effective use of sketchbooks to do homework and as a place to explore new ideas and log the stages of their projects.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum gives students a good breadth of study across two and three-dimensional processes, and of work on different scales.

They enjoy what they do, although there are insufficient opportunities for them to explore the use of computers as a creative medium.

- Students' positive response at Key Stage 3 means that they opt for the subject in good numbers at GCSE. Here, the unendorsed course offers a wide variety of approaches that meets their needs well, despite the lack of computers representing a gap in learning opportunities at this age too.
- The themes around which students work are well chosen to appeal to them. Quite rightly, there is an expectation that students will respond in progressively more individual ways, especially as they move through the GCSE course and prepare for advanced level study.
- Regular reference to the work of other artists supports students' learning. Teachers' subject expertise ensures these links are valid. However, insufficient first-hand experience of practising artists and their work places some restrictions on students' creative development'.
- Students have good opportunities to attend extra-curricular sessions in the art department. Staff go to considerable lengths to ensure students feel well supported and welcomed, even offering tea for older students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- Subject leadership is committed and passionate about the value of the subject. This underpins the work of the whole department.
- Effective teamwork between staff results in shared resources and ideas. There is a clear focus on trying new ways of approaching projects, which exemplifies well for students the creative aspects of the subject.
- Sustained good-quality provision shows the impact of subject leadership over time. Logical next steps are included in subject development plans, although some stated priorities lack precision in how they will be achieved and reflect in better outcomes for students.
- Subject monitoring involves a good routine of lesson observation, analysis of assessment data and work scrutiny. This effectively identifies successful aspects of provision and areas which could be better. Nevertheless, some opportunities are missed to focus monitoring, for example lesson observations, on specific aspects of teaching, so as to sharply identify what needs to improve and/or the impact of new approaches.
- Some useful links are made with external partners, such as a network of secondary schools, to support the subject. Enriching students' learning through exploiting local resources, such as museums and galleries, are underdeveloped.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving progress in lessons further by consistently ensuring students understand the features of successful work and the purpose for which it is made, and by planning activities which always meet their differing needs

- enriching the curriculum by using computers as a creative medium, and by giving students direct experience of artists' work and of artists at work
- increasing further the impact of subject leadership by ensuring priorities for improvement always focus closely on outcomes for students and that monitoring strategies are tailored to checking the impact being made.

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 sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector