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Mr P Campling
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Campling

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 2 and 3 February 2011 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.

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.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

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

- The school's assessment data indicates that many students join the school with lower than average attainment and relatively low levels of literacy. As a result of very well structured practical projects and a strong focus on developing students' verbal and written communication skills students make excellent progress in art and textiles. A high proportion chooses to take a GCSE course in art or textiles and results have been well above average in each of the last three years. The improving trend in this period meant that almost half of the students gained A* and A grades in 2010.
- From Year 7 students develop a sound understanding of how to use visual language to record from observation and express their ideas and responses to set themes. They develop confidence in manipulating a wide

range of media and materials, and in using line, mark making, tone, texture and colour to explore the visual world and realise their ideas.

- Students are very well supported in developing critical and reflective skills as they progress through the school. They learn how to identify and describe characteristics in art work and are able to discuss how these have been used and to what effect. By Key Stage 4, students are increasingly able to annotate their work confidently and evaluate what has worked well, and how they might further improve or extend their work. GCSE students demonstrate the ability to synthesise what they have learned, combining practical skills and techniques, critical analysis of other artists' work and the ability to reflect on their own work, to produce high quality, original and personalised art work.
- Students' enjoyment of the subject is evident in their very positive attitudes and in the high number who choose it for GCSE. Students explained how teachers' enthusiasm, praise and encouragement helped build their confidence and self-esteem, and helped them to work more independently. Many have high expectations of what they can achieve. For example, a group of Year 10 and 11 students interviewed were all aiming for A* or A grades at GCSE and all had a very clear understanding of their current progress and what they needed to do to achieve their goals.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teaching is highly effective in ensuring that students develop the necessary subject skills to achieve well and produce high quality work. A combination of teachers' thorough subject knowledge and a passion for the subject inspires students and encourages high expectations. Teachers plan lessons and resources very well to ensure students can make the best possible progress. This is particularly evident in Key Stage 3, where teachers use very clearly structured projects and learning resources, for practical and written work, to ensure students know exactly what they need to do to achieve the intended outcomes.
- Successful strategies to improve students' ability to talk and write about art include regular use of key word sheets, where students define specialist terms in their own words, and prompts to support description and evaluation of art work. This very structured approach is highly effective in helping students to acquire relevant practical and communication skills and in increasing their confidence in their abilities, which supports very strong progress over time. Although students do not always enjoy written work, they can articulate how it helps them to think about their own work and develop their ideas, and understand its importance in examination work.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good. Students value teachers' honesty in their praise and constructive criticism of their work. They make the best progress when teachers keep a brisk pace and use imaginative resources to inspire them. Demonstrations and visual examples help them to understand what they need to do. Very

occasionally, lessons get off to a slow start, where the teacher talks too much, or where overlong verbal instructions do not help students to know how to proceed. Most students concentrate well on their work in lessons and make very good progress, though a few Year 9 boys were observed to have lost concentration which slowed their progress and that of others.

- Students receive regular verbal and written feedback from teachers so that they know how to improve their work. All students have assessment sheets in their books, clearly referenced to appropriate levels of achievement and assessment criteria. Teachers encourage self and peer-assessment through students annotating their work and recording progress, and through discussion in class. In one Year 11 lesson observed, students gave very good feedback on strengths and possible improvements in each others' work, demonstrating high levels of mutual trust and respect.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Very careful and coherent curriculum planning enables students to build skills and knowledge progressively, within each year and as they move through the school. They are introduced to a wide range of two and three-dimensional media and techniques within art and textiles, so that they develop skills and confidence in selecting and using a variety of approaches. Varied and interesting projects introduce students to a range of ideas and experiences, encouraging drawing from observation and exploring other artists' work. For example, a project on still life 'vanitas' paintings in Year 9 encouraged students to explore art in an historical context, and how the depiction of objects can convey symbolic meaning.
- Project work is very tightly structured, especially during Key Stage 3 to support sound skills development, with increasing opportunities for a more individual approach in Key Stage 4, where students develop more personalised responses or choose their own themes. Older students often set their own homework specifically linked to their individual project work. Aspects such as drawing are revisited regularly, to build skills progressively and to extend ways in which students use drawing as a means to research and record but also to generate ideas, visualise outcomes and plan for the execution of final pieces.
- Students in Years 7 and 10 benefit from gallery or museum visits linked to specific projects, though these opportunities are not available for all year groups. The school is developing community links; for example some students enjoyed developing their own work in response to an exhibition in a local art centre and the school is contributing to a tapestry project linked to the 2012 Olympics. In recent years, students have not had opportunities to work directly with other practitioners and thus enhance their understanding of how artists or designers work and the role of art in the wider community or commercial world.
- Students rarely make use of digital media in their work, except when using the internet for research. Lack of access to appropriate equipment and

software during art lessons means they do not have the opportunity to explore this as another tool to support their creative development.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- Strong leadership ensures that students have a very positive experience of art and textiles and high levels of success in external examinations. The subject leader and advanced skills teacher work very closely together in planning curriculum content and ensuring high quality teaching and learning across the team. The recent restructure of the department brought these two previously strong areas together, and the resulting sharing of expertise and good practice has strengthened the work, and improved results further in 2010.
- The subject leader is highly committed and demonstrates a real passion for the subject, reflected in her high expectations of staff and students. The department has been very successful in recent years, but leaders are not complacent, and staff are keen to make further improvements. Leaders have a clear understanding of the many strengths evident in the department, but are also aware of how they might strengthen the work further, for example, through providing opportunities to use digital media to enhance students' work and in developing external partnerships to enable students to experience how creative practitioners work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing opportunities for students to use digital media in art and textiles to further enhance their creative development
- making better use of external partnerships to enable students to experience working directly with artists and designers to enhance their understanding of the arts in society.

I hope 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

Janet Mercer
Her Majesty's Inspector