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Ms E Dixon
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Dixon

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 30 September and 1 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 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 six lessons.

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.

- From average starting points, most students make good progress in Years 7 to 9. Boys and girls achieve effective work across a range of two and three-dimensional media; colour and pattern work are particular strengths. Baseline assessments and sketchbook work indicate that many students progress well in the development of observation and drawing skills. However, not all students develop the confidence to draw adventurously or make informed choices, constrained by limited first-hand experience of original work created by other artists, craftworkers and designers.
- Students taking a GCSE in the subject make good progress, achieving A* to C grades above national averages. The quality of their sketchbook work is a significant improvement on earlier approaches because students take more ownership of their work, responding creatively to more open-ended

challenges. Research and experimentation are used well to build a repertoire of skills and mix media. The best work combines direct observation with imagination in both two and three dimensions. However, creative use of digital media is underdeveloped.

- While the proportion of students taking fine art or photography is small, their work is both well crafted and highly creative. Examples of work indicate that students who pursue the subject for two years make good progress, often driven by ambitions to continue with the subject after leaving school. Although individual reflection and commitment are strong, opportunities are missed for sixth formers to develop their leadership and communication skills by promoting the subject with younger students.
- Students' enjoyment of the subject is evident in all years. Boys make a particularly strong contribution to discussion, but the popularity of the subject as an examination option has been constrained in the past by students' limited awareness of different applications of the subject, their confidence in drawing or enthusiasm to write. Increased breadth and use of media is starting to attract more diverse groups of students, including a wider range of academic ability.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Staff are very enthusiastic when teaching the subject. They demonstrate confidently, encouraging the students to work beyond their comfort zone with the challenge 'don't be a bore explore'. A well-chosen range of examples stimulate students' creativity but opportunities for students to take decisions, for example about the scale of work, are too limited. In the best lessons, students are involved in demonstrations enabling staff to observe the responses of other students and question their understanding.
- Students' progress over time is tracked regularly and teachers use assessment information well to target support. Marking is accurate, but not always expressed sufficiently clearly to promote an independent response. Discussions about the progress of students' work are handled very well individually and as a group, but the impact is lessened when positioned at the end of lessons. Examination objectives are used well with the older students but assessment tasks in Years 7 to 9, while promoting and monitoring observational drawing, do not reward creativity enough.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Several successful projects in Years 7 to 9 involve a series of short activities that combine in an outcome that challenges students' ability to apply their learning. This approach has an evident impact on achievement in later years because students understand how to use preparation to build ideas and refine skills culminating in work that remains lively and unpredictable. Visits by examination groups to art galleries complement learning in school, promoting students' creativity by increasing their

awareness about the diverse range of possible outcomes. However, too few students make their options without having experienced an art gallery.

- The subject curriculum has broadened in the recent years to include more three-dimensional work in Years 10 and 11, a BTEC option alongside GCSE, and a photography option alongside the fine art A-level. The impact on the recruitment and achievement of boys and girls is positive. However, the range of traditional media preferred by most students as they move through the school indicates that the curriculum does not build equal confidence across a full range of media, particularly digital and three-dimensional media. Good knowledge of artists contrasts with limited awareness of craftworkers or designers, including local practitioners.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- A rising trend in students' attainment in the subject, an increase in the proportion of good teaching, and the widening of the subject curriculum indicate that leadership and management are good. The profile of the subject in the school and community has been raised, for example through very well received exhibitions. However, while high-quality work by older students is exhibited in school, evidence of research could be shared more openly, including work by younger students or creative practitioners who work in the locality. Workshops by a local watercolour artist are used successfully to inspire the students and refresh the specialist skills of staff.
- Senior staff are well informed about developments in the subject and have used opportunities to enhance staffing creatively. Priorities have rightly focused on addressing underachievement. The subject leader is now well positioned to develop links with other subjects, for example by making connections with other art forms associated with specialist performing arts status. Development planning provides an adequate basis for further improvement. However, success criteria are insufficiently precise to evaluate progress in relation to aims, for example participation rates.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- widening the appeal and success of the subject further by:
 - ensuring that topics are equally relevant to boys and girls
 - increasing opportunities for students to work from first hand experience
 - valuing creative development more explicitly through assessment
 - using three-dimensional and digital media more regularly.

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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector