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Ms R Woodward
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Woodward

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 7 and 8 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of four lessons and an after school art club.

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.

- Many students enjoy the subject and the numbers choosing to study art at GCSE have increased in the last year. Students value the opportunity to work creatively, and express themselves through opportunities to exercise personal choice in their work. Cross-curricular links with other subjects, for example, in history and citizenship, make a positive contribution to students' personal development through enhancing their social awareness and historical understanding.
- The proportion of students achieving A*-C grades at GCSE has improved from below average in 2008 to above average in 2010. In the most recent year the proportion achieving the highest A*-A grades was also above average. Students make good progress by the end of Key Stage 4.

- Students develop good practical skills, including drawing and painting from observation, and learn to use confidently a varied range of two- and three-dimensional media. Good links with design technology extends students' knowledge and skills through using different tools and equipment, including electronics, as demonstrated through in the kinetic sculpture project.
- In Years 10 and 11 students confidently work independently, researching artists relevant to their topic, and developing personalised responses. The best work clearly demonstrates how students have learned from researching other artists' work and applied this to their own work. Good use of first-hand study and research, using their own drawing or photography, helps students to pursue personalised lines of investigation. Students demonstrate good levels of confidence in working on a large scale and handling paint well. Some students still do not go beyond pasting in photocopies of other artists' work and making minimal, factual notes. They rely too heavily on secondary sources, and do not think enough about how to apply what they learned to their own ideas.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- There have been recent changes in staffing in the department, with some teachers joining, or returning to, the department this academic year. While some teaching observed effectively motivated and challenged students, in a few lessons not all students made the expected progress. Teachers plan lessons well providing good opportunities for students to develop practical skills, explore other artists' work and build confidence in evaluating their own and others' work. Students made most progress when they were working independently under clear guidance and supervision from the teacher. They worked purposefully, maintaining good levels of concentration. They responded well to skilled questioning by the teacher, which encouraged them to think for themselves and find their own solutions to practical or aesthetic problems. The teacher made good use of opportunities to enhance students' literacy skills through checking and extending their understanding of subject specific and more general vocabulary.
- While teaching is satisfactory overall, in one lesson observed, the teacher did not make effective use of the school's rigorous behaviour management policy. Students took too long to settle down and the lesson got off to a slow start. Some students were too easily distracted and not fully concentrating on the tasks set. The time available for the planned practical activity was reduced when teachers needed to continually refocus students' attention or manage the disruptive behaviour of a few. Not all students completed, or made sufficient progress, on the set tasks.
- Students receive regular feedback on their work, through verbal feedback in lessons and through written comments from teachers, when workbooks are marked, for example, on completion of a project. Students in Years 10 and 11 knew their target grades, their current progress and how to achieve higher grades. Students in Key Stage 3 were less confident in identifying their targets and less sure about how well they were achieving these.

- Good progress is being made in revising approaches to assessment in Key Stage 3, both to assess more rigorously students' abilities and prior experience in the subject when they join the school, and to develop a more robust means of monitoring individuals' progress from their starting points. Plans are in place to implement an easily understood, visual method of recording achievement, linked to assessment data to monitor each students' progress.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum enables students to explore a variety of themes and approaches to art, design and craft, and use digital technology when appropriate. For example, comprehensive planning and good resources for a Year 7 project based on the 'Mexican Day of the Dead' enables students to explore drawing, painting, pattern work and three-dimensional mask-making, as well as exploring different cultural sources and references. The subject leader is revising the Key Stage 3 curriculum to enhance students' acquisition of the skills and working methods required for higher level study, including a stronger focus on research, annotation and evaluation. At Key Stage 4, students are encouraged to develop a more individual response and receive a useful booklet, containing assessment criteria, a glossary of terms and research sources to support a more independent approach.
- Students work regularly on cross-curricular projects with a variety of subjects, which extends their understanding of connections between topics. Collaborative work between art and Design and technology is well developed, through joint projects during enrichment days and activity weeks. For example, a workshop on kinetic sculpture effectively combined art and electronics, has since been developed as a theme for GCSE coursework in both subjects. Year 7 students on a joint art and Design and technology visit to RAF Duxford used drawing to record their experiences and objects seen. Art and design technology students worked together on designing and making three-dimensional structures for the Lord Mayor's show.
- While some students have benefitted from visits to galleries to study art works at first hand, this has not been consistently planned to ensure all students regularly have the opportunities to do so. The school makes some use of the local William Morris museum for specific projects, but has plans in place to ensure all Year 7 students visit, to establish a culture of such activities. Students say they would appreciate more opportunities to visit art galleries and some Key Stage 4 students visit galleries independently. Creative arts week projects have enabled some students to work directly with creative practitioners, though not all students have this experience.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- Since the appointment of the current subject leader, student achievement has improved considerably. Senior leaders and the subject leader have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the area. They are aware of the need to monitor the quality of teaching, provide appropriate support to teachers and share existing good practice to ensure that students make consistently good progress in lessons. Internal lesson observations are thorough and accurate and clearly identify areas for improvement. Senior leaders are focusing on improving assessment and tracking in Key Stage 3 as a priority for development this year.
- Students' achievement in the subject is well celebrated through display of work in the art rooms and around the school and through events and awards evenings. The school uses students' art work for school Christmas and thank you cards. Managers organise taster days at local colleges where students can participate in practical activities to support their choice of, and progression to, post-16 courses. The school also participates in external arts events such as the 'Big Draw' to promote participation and enjoyment of the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- Ensuring that students make good progress in all lessons by:
 - planning lessons with a crisp start and well-paced activities that keep students fully engaged throughout, so that all complete the planned activities
 - consistently implementing the school's behaviour management procedures to ensure that poor behaviour by a minority does not disrupt learning for others.
- Plan opportunities in the curriculum to ensure that all students benefit from studying art works at first hand and working with creative practitioners
- Raise achievement further by ensuring that all students develop and extend their personalised responses to other artists' work and make more use of first-hand research.

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