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Mr I Robertson
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Dear Mr Robertson

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 March 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 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 nine lessons, including two jointly observed.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

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

- Students make satisfactory progress in developing subject skills, knowledge and understanding, following a strong start in Year 7. Their confident use of line and tone when exploring local architecture for the 'gargoyles' project, and well-informed use of colour when responding to the theme of 'landscape' are strengths. Students' eager responses to stimuli and questions indicate a keen interest in the subject, particularly where topics are of personal relevance. The proportion choosing to take a GCSE in the subject is around the national average.
- Following a period of fluctuating performance at GCSE, boys and girls currently in Years 10 and 11 are making satisfactory progress from varying levels of prior attainment and experience. Students' experimentation with a wide range of two- and three-dimensional and digital media promotes

their creativity and enjoyment well. While students' finished pieces are often competently executed, the lively and expressive qualities of their preparation are strengths sometimes lost in translation. A contributory factor is their limited first-hand experience of work by artists, craftworkers and designers which for some students is restricted to the highly refined paintings displayed by sixth-form students, which they aspire to.

- The good achievements of sixth-form students are influenced by their experience of art galleries and contemporary work by artists, craftworkers and designers. For example, the scale of their paintings and intricacy of their work in textiles. Their most successful achievements apply a depth of understanding about the meaning and purpose of the work of others to their own work, albeit mostly fine artists. Retention from AS to A level and progression to art-related courses are good. However, students' readiness to take ownership of their work is varied, for example by analysing and making connections to the work of others independently. Some students succeed in tackling work that is challenging to create, and to appreciate.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teaching is consistently enhanced by very effective use of computer technology to show inspiring images. Some studio displays also contribute to students' learning by juxtaposing images and text that promote students' curiosity and reflection. The sixth-form studio is also starting to develop as a visual reference for students in all years, by revealing the process of working as an artist. Displays in public areas are not yet exploited, for example as opportunities to model critical reflection or to teach students how to learn from visits to art galleries. Where observed, demonstration has a profound impact on students' fascination with process and their focus, but is underused, particularly involving students.
- Relationships between staff and students are good; opportunities to continue work in between lessons are popular. Teachers' subject knowledge is respected by the students, but some remain too dependent where insufficient emphasis is given to teaching students how to prepare for lessons. However, the quality of marking is an improving feature; the best combines the views of staff and students in reflecting and agreeing ways to progress. Improvements in the whole-school use of assessment information is also informing lesson planning but could still be used more consistently to prepare a wider range of activities suited to students' needs, interests and aspirations. Links between activities and objectives are not always clear, including how content relates to the wider world.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Students enjoy a satisfactory range of opportunities to learn about art created in different times and places, including the locality. The traditional fine-art focus is being broadened to embrace craft and design, and widen

opportunities to explore more vocational links through different courses and experiences, including the use of professional computer software. The breadth of two- and three-dimensional and digital media is widening participation and accelerating the pace of learning for different students. However, courses do not currently emphasise the importance of direct experience often enough. In particular, visits to art galleries and work with contemporary artists are mostly limited to sixth-form students.

- Drawing is integrated effectively into many projects which enable students to gain confidence in using a range of media to explore and express ideas. However, the tasks used to assess students' drawing skills at the start of Year 7 and as they progress through the school, focus on a narrow range of skills, mostly observational drawing. Curriculum links are underdeveloped, for example with primary schools to nurture students' creativity early, with other subjects to explore through art, issues of personal and wider significance, with art communities to broaden students' experience of work achieved in other schools or through other approaches, such as the Arts Council Arts Award.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- The quality of subject self-evaluation is good, having a discernable impact on improving inclusion in the subject. Plans to increase the range of accreditation offered build on the widening use of two- and three-dimensional and digital media recently introduced which is appealing to different groups of students. Moderation of judgements about the quality of provision, between middle and senior leadership, is a strength with clear and well-informed priorities for the subject aligned where appropriate to the whole-school strategy to become outstanding. Subject improvement plans also target the need to moderate judgements about students' learning and achievement within school and with other schools, in line with the whole-school 'aiming high' strategy to fulfil students' potential.
- Following a period of some instability in staffing, the department is aware of the need to build on traditional strengths and popularity with students while raising standards across the ability range. While some variation in the quality of provision still exists, for example between key stages, the accurate identification of strengths of individual staff and schemes, together with excellent new accommodation, positions the subject well for further improvement. However, improvement plans do not currently identify individual roles and responsibilities sufficiently clearly, including students who are capable and committed ambassadors of the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- supporting students in developing the confidence and creativity to take their experimental use of different media through to finished outcomes
- increasing opportunities for students in all key stages to experience first-hand the work of artists, craftworkers and designers

- using assessment information to plan lessons that meet the needs, interests and aspirations of different groups of students consistently well
- defining and developing the roles and responsibilities of staff and students to maximise their potential and that of the subject across the school.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design education at Richmond 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