

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr A McNamara
Headteacher
St Augustine's Roman Catholic High School
Elker Lane
Billington
Clitheroe
BB7 9JA

Dear Mr McNamara

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 17 and 18 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 seven lessons, including one jointly observed.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is good.

- Girls and boys taking an examination in the subject consistently achieve results well above national averages. A good number continue studying art at college; a former student was commissioned to paint a portrait of Her Majesty The Queen. However, a small proportion opt for the GCSE, particularly boys.
- Overall, students make good progress in the subject and enjoy their work. In lessons, Year 7 students demonstrate good understanding of colour, deepened through their analysis of other artists' work. They show confidence in experimenting and creating individually and collaboratively.
- As students progress through the school, many refine their skills using two-dimensional media. Pencil work is skilfully crafted. Digital media is

handled creatively. However, not all students regularly tackle the additional challenge of working from direct experience, relying on secondary sources.

- Research in sketchbooks is very well presented. Exploration using three-dimensional media is underdeveloped. Students express their feelings well, for example in response to the theme of 'neglect'. However, connections between their own work and that of other artists are not always explicit.
- The school's positive evaluation of students' views was reinforced through discussion with students during the visit. They value the opportunities to learn about different artists, particularly through workshops with them. The students who have visited art galleries appreciate the significance.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Staff use computer technology effectively to emphasise and illustrate key messages. Images of students' work are used alongside examples of other artists' work very successfully. Some subject documents show a similar flair for presentation, reflecting students' expectations.
- A strength of the teaching of younger students is the mixture of whole class, group and individual activity, driving a brisk pace of learning. The GCSE lessons are characterised by effective one-to-one support but the pace of learning is slower, often leading to extensive work out of lessons.
- Relationships between staff and students are good. Insights into the artist in the teacher, exposed through inviting displays of stimuli or through passionate references to the local landscape, captivate the students. They particularly appreciate it when staff or visiting artists share their own work.
- Assessment information is used satisfactorily to monitor students' progress, including their creative development. Discussion with students is encouraging and informative. The use of marking to set short-term targets is a weaker aspect of assessment.
- The impact of teaching on students' attitudes and achievement is generally good. Creative teaching in Year 7 had inspired the students to work on their home learning projects independently and imaginatively, and be clear about the learning objectives, including the importance of originality.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum develops students' skills, knowledge and understanding in predominantly two-dimensional media. The introduction of digital media is beginning to attract more boys. However, the development of three-dimensional work is at an early stage, particularly large-scale construction.
- Links to the wider curriculum include some good practice. A recent 'Lancashire Day' successfully involved local artists and references to local

landscape. Work related to the school's specialism in modern languages inspired effective work inspired by Gaudi's architecture in Barcelona.

- The curriculum integrates 'personal, learning and thinking' skills. However, enabling students to 'think and act like artists, craftworkers and designers', the thrust of the new secondary subject curriculum, is limited by lack of opportunities in Years 7 and 8 to experience the work of others first-hand.
- The range of accreditation offered is widening to include photography. Recent opportunities to start the existing course early are complemented by the option of an enrichment course. Staff are aware that starting the GCSE at an earlier stage in students' maturation requires further adaptation.
- Drawing is well established in the schemes of work as a skill fundamental to the subject. However, some students remain unconvinced about their ability to draw. The methods currently used provide limited opportunities for students to learn how and why different creative practitioners 'draw'.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- Throughout a period of instability in subject leadership, the standards achieved by students have remained above average. Nevertheless, the popularity of the subject as an option is modest, indicating a need to promote the subject more effectively, including its wider relevance.
- Senior staff take a keen interest in the subject. The impact of visual imagery on students' spiritual and personal development is understood, and supported by examples of religious art from around the world displayed publicly, a resource not yet integral to the subject curriculum.
- Priorities for improvement in the subject are informed by self-evaluation. For example, investment in professional-standard computers is directly linked to monitoring and evaluation that indicated a need to engage different groups of students more effectively, particularly boys.
- Staff expertise is now suitably varied to increase the breadth of the subject curriculum, including three-dimensional and vocational experience. Visiting artists, craftworkers and designers enrich students' experiences well, although their expertise is not always selected to fill evident gaps.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the participation and performance of different groups, boys in particular, by:
 - widening the curriculum to include more exploration and extended work using three-dimensional media
 - enriching the curriculum with more direct experience, and guidance about using art galleries as a resource
 - developing experimental approaches to drawing to complement the traditional methods already established

- enabling students to demonstrate more explicitly the connections between their own work and that of other artists
- promoting the subject more visibly, including the vocational and wider relevance of the subject.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design education at 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector