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Mr K Mann
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mann

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 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 four lessons, including one jointly observed.

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.

- Students' early work and response to the school's baseline creativity task indicate average attainment. However, boys and girls make swift progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding in and through the subject. By the end of Year 9, many students have achieved an Arts Award. Confidence in using mixed-media builds quickly, evident in their self-portrait prints embellished with different graphic media in Year 7. The quality of drawing from direct observation is more variable.
- A very high proportion of boys and girls take a GCSE in the subject. Over the past three years boys and girls have consistently attained A* or A and A* to C grades well above national averages. Their excellent progress is underpinned by increasing personalisation of projects. Themes connected to issues of particular relevance, interest and concern to teenagers,

motivates them. Two-, three-dimensional and, increasingly, digital media are used imaginatively and skilfully. Visual research is wide ranging, the best supported by direct observation. While not always explicit, discussion with students reveals deep reflection on their own and other artists' work. Students value the subject; a high proportion continues with art post-16.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- The impact of teaching on students' achievement is strengthened by mutually respectful relationships between teachers and students, and between teachers. Team teaching is particularly effective because the open plan art studio is exploited, preferred teaching styles mix well and the time invested in preparing stimuli reaches a wider group of students. In a shared presentation observed, computer resources were used interactively to increase students' participation, a challenge that boys responded to well. In other lessons, despite energetic teaching, students' keenness to continue working individually limits the whole-class dynamic.
- Teachers make high expectations explicit by using examples of students' work, supported by guidance about how to reach high standards. The role of students, for example in organising and managing particular activities, is developing well. Past students continue to support teaching; a sixth former was observed talking through her portfolio.
- Written assessments do not reflect the quality of advice given to students, particularly about how to develop specific strengths or capitalise on their creativity. However, students' work, ranging from a wrapped car in the school car park inspired by Christo, to a fresco inspired by Surrealism, shows that helping students relate their thinking to that of specific artists, based on keeping teachers' subject knowledge refreshed, is fundamental to students' success.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Students enjoy a broad range of opportunities to explore different media and methods, and investigate the art, craft and design from different cultures and times, including contemporary work. This is particularly creditable given the small size of school and teaching team. However, the expertise of visiting artists is used well to increase students' understanding about the meaning and purpose of artists' work, a weaker aspect of learning where computer generated information or images are insufficiently interrogated. Visits to art galleries also add to students' experience and increase their creative aspirations about what might be possible. The students interviewed were keen to know more about local galleries to visit.
- Progression is skilfully planned; liaison with primary schools and post-16 provision ensures that students are well prepared. The range of work in Years 7 and 8 enables students to make informed choices about pursuing

accreditation in the subject, starting with the Arts Award and progressing to GCSE. Year 11 work shows that students' transition from shared, teacher-led topics to diverse student-led topics is structured well. Opportunities for students to develop their wider skills in and through the subject are thoughtfully structured, for example by researching and presenting a personal project in Year 9, or by following up and preparing for lessons, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Additional challenge for more able artists is evident in a project culminating in the public exhibition of Year 8 and 9 work at Barnard Castle. Students are keen to develop their leadership and promote innovation in the subject further, for example by establishing and managing a community gallery.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- The subject has developed strong links with the performing arts, evident in the expressive quality of students' work. The Artsmark Award is used strategically to review and improve provision across art forms. The whole-school focus on developing students' personal qualities, including spirituality and leadership, is promoted through specific initiatives, including the Arts Council Arts Award. More recently, productive links with design and technology have started which enable students to understand different applications of the subject in the wider world, for example through a visit to the Design Museum in London.
- A wide range of partnerships ensures that this small department achieves a big impact. Entrepreneurial subject leadership means that few opportunities to engage the students in projects in or outside school are missed. However, the subject leader skilfully shifts the responsibility for the leadership of projects to the students. For example, the 'legacy of hope' memorial to the Holocaust was documented and shared with parents and carers in the school newsletter through students' writing. A recent project to design hangings for York Minster is a further example of how the Christian ethos of the school is embraced through the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- sustaining high participation and performance in the subject by ensuring that students analyse their work more explicitly
- developing students' leadership in the subject further by enabling them to develop work with different groups in the school and wider community.

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