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Mr D Coombes
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Coombes

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 26 and 27 January 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 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 and observation of eight lessons.

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.

- The school's assessment data indicates that students join the school with lower than average prior attainment and underdeveloped literacy skills. They are often not very confident about their abilities in the subject, especially in drawing and in writing about their own work, or that of other artists.
- Students in Key Stage 3 make satisfactory progress in their understanding and use of formal elements and different media. Students are encouraged to evaluate their work, analyse and respond to work of other artists, but many find writing about art difficult. In previous years, there was less focus on developing these critical and reflective skills so that students now taking the BTEC first diploma or certificate courses do not yet evaluate their work

sufficiently. Annotation in sketchbooks is sometimes sparse, or tends to be confined to notes on technique or biographical information on artists.

- Pass rates are high on BTEC courses and for the small number of students taking A-level courses, but the school is aware that too few students achieve higher grades. Where practical work is strongest, students draw directly from various sources, bring a more personal interpretation to set project themes and complete work with a good quality of finish. They explore different media and techniques and are able to identify strengths and areas for development in their own work. However, many students are not yet responding well enough to teachers' advice and encouragement to complete work and to a higher standard, and to annotate their work.
- Many students enjoy the subject and a very high proportion choose to study the subject in Key Stage 4. Students like having opportunities to make choices about which materials they use or how they interpret the subject matter. While teachers encourage them to make their own choices, many lack confidence in choosing their own themes and prefer the security of working to a theme set by the teachers, even when in the sixth form.
- Work with the 'Creative Partnerships' initiative makes a strong contribution to students' personal development. Those involved in community projects spoke positively about how this boosted their confidence and helped develop independence. Working with external partners and creative practitioners increased students' understanding of the relevance of art and design in the world and how it can have an impact in their own community.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Recent changes in staffing in the department means that four of the five current teachers are new to teaching, or new to the department, in the last two years. Teachers are enthusiastic about the subject and committed to ensuring students achieve as well as they can. Their recent training helps to bring in fresh ideas and approaches, and teachers are focusing strongly on developing practical and evaluative skills to raise achievement.
- Teachers plan well to provide a good variety of activities in lessons to engage and maintain students' interest. In longer lessons, teachers make good use of varied activities to maintain a good pace and help students make good progress in lessons. Teachers know their students well and provide good support to encourage students to develop more personal work and greater independence.
- Teachers develop students' literacy skills through extending their understanding of general and specialist vocabulary, to improve their ability to talk and write about art work. Specialist vocabulary sheets are displayed in classrooms and used well to support analysis of artists' work. Teachers encourage students to discuss their analysis and responses in lessons to develop their communication skills, though some students find it difficult to concentrate on listening to others for too long.

- Regular verbal feedback and written comments at the end of each project ensures that students on examination courses know their current progress, and what they need to do to improve their work. However, feedback from teachers sometimes concentrates more on what they need to improve, rather than how they can do this. Many teachers are now making better use of peer and self-assessment, though the subject leader is aware that this needs to be developed and implemented more consistently.
- The school has not yet implemented a formal assessment of students' abilities in the subject in Year 7, which has made it difficult to assess accurately students' progress from their individual starting points or to set realistic targets for their achievement in the subject.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum provides good opportunities for students to explore a broad range of two- and three-dimensional work, including a variety of printmaking approaches and three-dimensional techniques, including working with clay, constructing in wire and model making linked to an architectural project in Year 8. The subject leader acknowledges that students do not have sufficient opportunities to explore digital media in a creative context.
- Schemes of work are clearly focused on what students will be learning through different activities, and opportunities for literacy development are identified. Activities are planned to meet the needs of the relatively high proportion who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has revised its sixth form consortium arrangements to plan for advanced vocational provision, so that students can progress more easily from BTEC courses to the sixth form.
- Students benefit from visits to museums, galleries and enjoy opportunities to draw outside the classroom, as in a visit to a park, when working on a natural forms project. Work through the 'Creative Partnerships' scheme provides excellent opportunities for student to engage in community projects and to work directly with creative practitioners. As well as inspiring students, such projects encouraged many families to attend events in local arts venues, often for the first time.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- The recently appointed subject leader has developed a cohesive subject team, building on individual's particular strengths and expertise. All staff support the whole school focus on raising achievement. The subject leader, together with senior leaders, has provided good support for new teachers. Regular review of their performance with detailed feedback on strengths

and areas for development has helped them to improve performance so that most teaching is now good.

- The subject leader has a good understanding of strengths and areas requiring improvement in the department. Analysis of students' achievement and findings from lesson observations are effective in identifying key areas for improvement. Having successfully achieved high pass rates on the BTEC courses, there is a clear priority to improve higher levels of achievement, through improving students' subject skills, building their confidence and raising aspirations. Actions in the subject improvement plan are strongly focused on raising achievement, but do not always include subject specific targets or milestones to help monitor progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- Raising achievement, especially the proportion achieving higher grades by:
 - ensuring students complete all work, and with a higher quality of finish
 - developing creative approaches such as working with digital media, photography, collage and photomontage, to help widen students' skills and build their confidence
 - providing structured support to help students improve their reflective and analytical skills, to improve their writing about art work
- implementing a system to assess students' prior attainment in the subject, to support more rigorous monitoring of the progress of individuals and different groups of students
- ensuring that improvement plans focus sharply on the relevant subject issues so that progress can be monitored against specific and measurable targets.

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