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Ms K Cardus  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Cardus

### **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 18 and 19 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 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 five 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.

- Overall achievement in art and design is satisfactory, but good in GCSE textiles and on the sixth form International Baccalaureate programme.
- At Key Stage 3, boys' achievement has been significantly below that of girls in the last three years. At GCSE, the proportion of boys achieving A\* to C grades has declined over three years, and was low for the small number of boys taking the subject in 2010. The proportion of students achieving A\*-A grades remains well below that expected, but is good in textiles, where two thirds of students achieve the highest grades. The school's most recent assessment data indicate that several Year 11 students are currently performing below expectation, with a significant amount of work to do to remedy this situation before final examinations.

- Students gain confidence and develop skills in using a variety of media and techniques. They manipulate formal elements, such as line, tone and texture, to record well from observation. In a Year 7 lesson, students understood colour theory well, working with warm, cool and complementary colours and were confident in colour mixing. However, the pace of lessons is sometimes slow and students make less progress than they could.
- Students enjoy the subject, particularly when they can make personalised choices, for example, in selecting the subject matter or materials they use. This is most evident in the sixth form, where students explore individual themes or issues which interest them, seeking out relevant historical and contemporary references to support their study. This approach is less well developed at GCSE, where students more commonly work from the artists' references provided by teachers, rather than extending their own research more widely.
- Sixth-form students identified that the brisker pace of work in Years 12 and 13 accelerated their progress. Teachers encourage them to work outside their comfort zone and explore new ideas, processes and concepts. For many, art is more than a school subject; it is an integral part of their life. One student said 'It's a lot of work, but a joy to do it.'
- In textiles, students' sketchbooks demonstrate very clear sequential development of their ideas and practice, from visual and contextual research, experimentation with materials and techniques, exploring different design solutions, to the realisation of the final piece. It is clear how cultural references and research informs students' own work. This structured development is inconsistent at GCSE where connections between research into other artists' work and their own, are less clear.
- Students often write fluently about their own work and other artists. However, not all students follow teachers' advice to be concise in their annotation. The best examples demonstrate students' learning clearly, but too often annotation describes processes rather than evaluating what has gone well or how work could be improved. Students are not always selective enough about the historical or biographical information chosen.

### **Quality of teaching of art, craft and design**

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

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan interesting and relevant activities and create some very good resources to support students' learning. However, lesson plans are not always sufficiently clear on how the activities planned support the achievement of the learning outcomes, or how the learning of more able students, or those who work more quickly, will be extended.
- Teachers encourage students to think for themselves. In a Year 9 lesson, the teacher used open questions well to encourage students to record their personal responses to, and interpretations of, portraits by other artists. However, teachers' questions are not always targeted sufficiently well to ensure that all students participate and contribute.

- The length of lessons, at 100 minutes, provides good opportunities for extended practical work and learning. However, starter activities sometimes take up too much time so that the main learning activities do not start quickly enough. On occasions, students do not complete as much work in the time as they could.
- Students' work is assessed regularly and they receive good verbal and written feedback on their work, identifying particular strengths and areas for development. This year, the school has introduced a half-termly summative assessment at the end of each project, which assesses skills and understanding through a practical and written task. Students are aware of their targets and know what they need to do to achieve them.

### **Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design**

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

- The curriculum offers a good breadth of work in two and three dimensions, enabling students able to explore printmaking, textile processes and three-dimensional construction and modelling techniques. Themes for project work are reviewed regularly. Students use the internet for research, and some make use of digital media to create their own source material and record their work.
- All year groups have opportunities to visits museums or galleries to study art work and artefacts at first hand. For example, Year 7 students working on a cross-curricular art and history project visited the local museum to study mediaeval tiles, and then designed and made their own tiles. GCSE students working on a tribal arts project visit a local ethnographic collection and draw from an interesting collection of mask and sculptures bought by the school. Students have exhibited their work in local galleries.
- Sixth-form students often use the local area for visual research, for example, drawing in Canterbury Cathedral and at Whitstable bay. They also make good use of gallery visits to Tate Modern to research artists of particular interest to them.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design**

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

- Managers' review of examination performance accurately identifies key areas requiring improvement and the subject leader monitors students' progress regularly. However, lesson observations carried out in the faculty review were not focused sufficiently on students' learning and progress in lessons. Strengths and areas for development were not always recorded in sufficient detail to share good practice effectively and support improvement.
- Plans to widen the participation of different groups indicate that inclusion is improving. For example, the subject leader has developed more three-dimensional design and making in Year 8 to increase boys' enjoyment of the subject. The proportion of boys taking art at GCSE has now increased significantly. However, it is too early to evaluate the full impact of

strategies taken, for example the improved monitoring of boys' progress. Managers have put in place effective specialist support for a student with severe physical disabilities to enable her to participate in sixth-form art.

- Teachers make good use of staff development opportunities. Having attended a course in using recycled materials, and another on using local museums as a resource, one teacher developed a successful project for Year 8 students, where they drew from insects, designed and created their own beetle, using card, wire and recycled drinks cans. The subject leaders' commitment to continuing professional development is evident in her own funding and participation in power drawing workshops.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- improving rates of progress in art and the proportion of students achieving the higher grades, particularly A\*-A grades at GCSE by:
  - encouraging GCSE students to make their work more personal, for example, finding artists other than those suggested by teachers, working with first-hand sources where possible and developing themes of personal interest
  - ensuring all students make the best possible progress in lessons by reviewing the timing of activities to increase the pace of students' work, and expecting more of students
  - monitoring the progress and achievement of different groups to ensure that boys and girls achieve equally well
- developing more rigorous and thorough self-evaluation at subject level, ensuring lesson observations are more focused on students' learning and provide clear feedback and targets to support improvement.

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

**Janet Mercer**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**