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Mrs H Loughran  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Loughran

### **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 29 and 30 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 10 lessons, including two jointly observed.

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

#### **Achievement in art, craft and design**

Students' achievement in art, craft and design is good with outstanding features.

- During their first year at the school, students develop great interest in the subject. They build confidence, particularly in the use of two-dimensional media, achieving above average work by the end of Year 9. The GCSE and BTEC courses are popular options, although fewer boys are recruited.
- Boys and girls achieve examination results well above national averages, including the highest grades. Two-dimensional work is a strength, underpinned by drawing using a wide range of tools and techniques, and skills in observation and composition refined by use of digital technology.

- The breadth of students' subject knowledge and understanding reflects their experience of media. The work of artists working at different times and in varied cultural contexts is appreciated and interpreted well. Their awareness of craft makers and designers is more limited.
- Outstanding achievement in the sixth form is characterised by fine art and photography that is often expressive and highly accomplished. Students use their increased experience of art first-hand, particularly contemporary work, to question and strengthen the scale and impact of their own work.
- Across all years, students' engagement in between lessons reflects strong commitment. Their best work is often driven by opportunities to exploit their imagination or respond to real events, for example a public gallery exhibition of sixth-form work or live link between BTEC work and an artist.

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

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

- Students' progress is monitored regularly and rigorously by all staff. Students are supported with clear guidance and many opportunities for additional advice between lessons. They value the subject to demonstrate their management of time, resources and ability to meet deadlines.
- Exemplary students' work is used skilfully to raise aspirations about what might be possible. This ranges from an annual summer exhibition to work exhibited in the studios and around the school. In lessons, staff use computer technology effectively to share their analysis of emerging work.
- The outstanding teaching promotes students' creativity by using knowledge about their individual interests and enquiry to pitch challenges. In a lesson observed, the teacher evaluated students' knowledge by using a lesser known image by an artist already studied, to provoke a debate.
- Staff work flexibly, all contributing to different courses and working across various media. Individual initiative in developing particular approaches and schemes contributes positively to ownership, combined with a shared sense of responsibility for consistently high standards.
- While little explicit use was made of 'the teacher as artist' during the visit, where scenarios were created to give students an insight into the creative industries, they were highly effective. For example, an 'interim board meeting' enabled students to promote and respond to ideas.

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

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

- The curriculum develops students' skills, knowledge and understanding particularly well in relation to two-dimensional media. The development of digital and three-dimensional media is beginning to widen participation and performance by different groups of students.

- First-hand experience of art galleries and museums is integrated effectively into examination courses, including European study visits in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Year 9 students make good use of the annual summer exhibition at school.
- The involvement of practising artists, craftworkers and designers in the curriculum is underdeveloped. However, vocational links are improving through the BTEC course. The role of sixth-form students as artists, able to inspire the work of younger students, is at an early stage of development.
- Students have regular opportunities to develop their drawing skills. The level of challenge in the sixth form increases through life drawing. The Royal Academy 'outreach' initiative also has a positive impact on their confidence to draw expressively on a large scale.
- The development of photography alongside fine art is popular with the sixth-form students, effective links made with their other areas of experience or studies. Evidence of the curriculum promoting earlier links includes a Year 9 project involving history and RE, linked to the Holocaust.

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

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

- A talented group of specialist staff has been appointed. Strong individual strengths are emerging. The team is well positioned to develop an exemplary department by distributing the leadership of school based and national initiatives to make the very best practice, common.
- The focus on outcomes achieved by students is clear and consistent. Data are used regularly to monitor students' progress and tackle underachievement, in line with whole-school approaches. As a consequence, students taking a qualification in the subject do well.
- The specialist accommodation has been adapted and expanded in response to students' needs and aspirations, for example improving provision for digital technology. Beyond the department, students' achievements are exhibited respectfully and shared with pride.
- Subject documentation, improvement planning in particular, does not do justice to the rationale that has enabled the department to grow successfully. Students' views and work scrutiny that are systematically analysed could, for example, be used more explicitly to inform plans.
- Students value the positive, calm and productive ethos that characterises the department. High levels of interest in continuing work in between lessons is indicative of a department in which staff and students are well motivated.

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

- maximising the talents of staff and students by:
  - embracing national initiatives in the subject

- contributing to national networks through innovations
- using their views to inform development planning.

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**