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Mr S Ash
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ash

Ofsted 2011–12 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 4 and 5 May 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 seven lessons, including one jointly observed.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is satisfactory with good features.

- In Years 7 to 9, students make satisfactory progress in developing their subject knowledge, understanding and skills, in two- and three-dimensional media, from widely variable prior experience. Effective work inspired by Indian textiles shows that students are able to use varied media to create colourful abstract images from direct observation, a strength from Year 7.
- Students enjoy their practical activities when organised individually and as a group. Boys and girls collaborate well, often working expressively on a large scale on group projects, for example their life-sized figures inspired

by the work of Tim Burton in Year 9. Their learning through class discussion is sometimes constrained by limited participation or listening.

- An above average proportion of boys and girls choose to take a GCSE in the subject. Results often match the high national proportion gaining A* to C grades but in the last two years the proportion of higher grades has declined. However, current Year 11 work shows significant improvement in attainment, good progress in developing skills evident from Year 10.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities generally achieve well and gain great pride in their creative achievements. However, more able students do not always capitalise on their strengths in other subjects, for example by demonstrating their depth of subject knowledge and understanding through annotation or personalised research.
- The good progress made by students is underpinned by regular practice, revisitation and refinement, for example their work in ceramics. Areas that are less well developed, for example the use of digital technology, are less well structured in the curriculum. Relevant work in sketchbooks is often underused by students to refer back and build on prior learning.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Students benefit from the range of expertise of the team of teaching and support staff who work effectively together. Where staff bring their wider experiences related to the subject into the classroom, lessons are enriched. For example, teachers' sketchbooks containing memories of travels or their first-hand knowledge of related careers displayed in the art area.
- The involvement of students in demonstrating their skills is a strength of teaching. During the class introduction in a Year 10 lesson, several students were invited to respond to a shared stimulus which the teacher used effectively to give value to originality. While students observed peer demonstration, the teacher observed and responded to their reactions.
- Teachers' planning is sound. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified clearly and sometimes particularly able students too, although strategies to personalise the level of challenge or approach to intervention is not often evident. While staff clearly know the students as individuals, students' work does not always reflect diversity.
- Students are clear about expectations of the lesson, their progress often reviewed effectively and collectively at the end of the lesson. Longer-term objectives, for example how skills developed in the lesson could be developed out of school, applied in other subjects or used in the creative industries, are less evident.
- Staff use skills sessions strategically to accelerate the pace of learning and raise standards. For example, a focus on large-scale expressive drawing had a very positive impact on subsequent work. In discussion, students

said that they valued opportunities to learn new techniques through direct teaching approaches that could be followed up independently.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum provides students with a breadth of opportunities to explore two- and three-dimensional media on a variety of scales, individually and collaboratively. While digital media is not fully embedded across both key stages, planning for progression, for example in ceramics where students' skills are developed incrementally, is an exemplary model.
- The range of topics explored provides a successful balance between the historical and contemporary themes that have inspired artists over time and those driven by the interests of different student groups. For example, the work of Ian Cook which uses motorised model cars as a painting tool is popular, particularly with the boys in Year 8.
- The recently extended range of accredited courses available, that includes a BTEC course alongside two GCSE options, enables students to pursue the strengths developed in Years 7 to 9 through breadth or specialisation. The themes explored by Year 10 and 11 students are narrower than earlier. For example, interpretations of identity, or the local landscape, are few.
- Students' first-hand experiences are regular. For example, structured visits to the school exhibition of original work created by students, is incorporated into the curriculum. In addition, students in Years 7 to 9 can visit the Lowry during their activities week. Opportunities to visit galleries, for example in Liverpool, and work at Chatsworth exist in Years 10 and 11.
- Opportunities to develop drawing skills, particularly from observation, are taken throughout, providing a link between diverse themes. For example, drawings incorporated into the 'interlocking and overlapping' topic in Year 10 enabled students to exploit their drawing and observation when tested. Approaches to building confidence in drawing in Years 7 to 9 are sound.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

The effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design is satisfactory with good features.

- The joint subject leaders have started to halt the decline in standards strategically, well informed by analysis, thorough self-evaluation and consultation with high-performing departments. Staff are conscious that to accelerate improvement while promoting students' creativity, the right balance between staff- and student-initiated work remains a priority.
- The development of information and communication technology in relation to teaching and its impact on learning and achievement, has not been fully exploited to address underachievement, for example the significantly lower performance of boys. However, computer resources within the

department, and use of the virtual learning environment, are about to be increased.

- Links with Manchester Metropolitan University, through mentoring trainee subject teachers, has a positive impact. Staff value the input of trainees who bring different expertise and ideas to the department while learning from established teachers. Networking with local providers and involvement in examination moderation inform improvement planning.
- A good presence of well-presented artwork by students exists across the school, which adds to their sense of achievement. Community displays increase the audience able to appreciate students' work, for example the local doctor's surgery, primary school and businesses. A partnership with Manchester City Gallery enabled a more able group to curate an exhibition.
- Subject leaders recognise the importance of evaluating students' performance regularly to promote achievement in line with their other subjects. The quality of feedback given to students through marking and individual advice is a strength and several groups benefit from having more than one teacher because shared groups are managed well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising students' attainment in the subject, particularly boys, and more able students by:
 - increasing the use of digital media
 - increasing opportunities for students to diversify and make choices, promoting their independence and creativity
 - using assessment information to challenge underachievement early
 - ensuring that students listen carefully and engage actively in discussion
 - applying students' learning in other lessons, for example using their work in English, to improve their annotation.

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