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Ms Ros McMullen
Headteacher
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Dear Ms McMullen

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 18 and 19 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 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 parts of 10 lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

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

- Students make satisfactory progress from low starting points during their first two years at the school. An above average proportion continues an art-related course from Year 9. They make good progress on the GCSE and BTEC courses, although the proportion of lower grades achieved is low.
- Students develop positive attitudes to learning in the subject, often sustaining interest throughout long periods of study. Cooperative work between students and with staff, and pride in their creative achievements, is common. Independent work is less evident, despite growing confidence.
- Students develop a breadth of subject knowledge and a wide range of skills in two-, three-dimensional and digital media. However, the depth

and quality of work associated with higher levels is sometimes constrained by insufficient persistence with ideas or techniques that have great potential.

- The impact of other artists, craftworkers and designers' work on students' creative development is good, although students at all levels often rely on their teacher to make the connections. However, students are very well informed about the applications of the subject in the wider world.
- Stronger work at GCSE and in the sixth form is supported by polished presentation and confident drawing. Their written annotation is not often as fluent as their convincing explanations, which have helped with their good success rates at interview for art-related courses and careers.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- Staff support students effectively through clear, well-presented guidance, confident demonstrations, and enthusiastic encouragement and advice. In one lesson observed, the teacher assessed students' understanding and promoted independence by involving students in demonstration.
- Assessment objectives are shared regularly with students. The impact on learning is best where the language used is clear, enabling students to evaluate their own progress in meeting the expectations of their course. The quality of lesson objectives in establishing short-term goals is variable.
- Relationships with students are very professional and personable. Good knowledge of students' individual needs informs the level and frequency of teacher intervention. The students interviewed said sensitive teaching enabled them to express personal feelings confidently, through their work.
- Staff manage resources effectively, modelling the expectations made of students. Displays in the art studios and public areas of the school celebrate achievement well. Nevertheless, opportunities are missed to show how to support imagery with writing, to explain meaning.
- Students value the feedback provided by staff through marking, and in particular through one-to-one dialogue in lessons. Peer-evaluation was managed very well in one lesson, by providing students with digital images of work created by other students, to stimulate critical comment.

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 well in relation to a wide range of two-, three-dimensional and digital media. The breadth of the subject curriculum promotes students' enjoyment well because they are often introduced to new experiences.
- The extent to which the curriculum builds on students' prior learning in order for them to take increasing responsibility, or pursue a depth of

enquiry, is more limited. There is further scope to show how challenges, influences and the unexpected, is used positively by creative practitioners.

- First-hand experience of art galleries and museums is integrated effectively into courses from Year 9. While subject visits or visitors are rarely used in Years 7 and 8, students' early focus on 'Me and my academy' is well chosen to introduce personal and architectural stimuli.
- 'Live' projects with a real purpose are a strength of the BTEC and Creative and Media Diploma courses. Digital media is integrated well, to support younger boys and girls too in working towards an outcome that will be shared publicly, for example, their 'Zombie Freshers from Hell' DVD.
- Topics achieve a good balance between capitalising on students' cultural interests and promoting cultural enrichment through wider reference. For example, an urban project decorating skateboards contrasts with the use of local artist Ashley Jackson's passion for the Yorkshire landscape.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- The subject has a strong impact across the academy, through the specialism in 'Design in the built environment' which is led with energy, enthusiasm and entrepreneurialism. Strong links with design and technology contribute to the breadth of the curriculum, and achievement.
- The focus on outcomes achieved by students is suitably clear in subject plans and procedures. Strategic decisions, for example to offer particular curriculum options, take good account of students' needs, interests and aspirations, and the potential of the subject to promote inclusion.
- A good teaching team has been built, well supported by documentation and design developed at middle leader level. However, lesson observation and feedback are not always clearly focused or judged in relation to current targets, for example boosting the proportion of higher grades attained.
- Self-evaluation is outward looking, informed by experience of other schools and educational settings, and the views of staff at all levels. Their individual roles and responsibilities are developing with their experience. The stimulus resources developed by all staff show good collaboration.
- The annual academy arts festival contributes to the 'sense of occasion' developed expertly across the school, to promote and celebrate students' achievements together. Although the involvement of creative practitioners is not highly developed, they are thoughtfully used to add additional value.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of students attaining the higher grades by:
 - supporting students in demonstrating their thinking, through annotation and other forms

- building students' confidence in pursuing ideas and competence in refining subject specific skills, including drawing
- developing students' independence, including through the roles and responsibilities of 'creative practitioners' in the sixth form.

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. 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