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Mrs Jayne Barron  
Headteacher  
Sturminster Newton High School  
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Dear Mrs Barron

### **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 28-29 June 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 four lessons.

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

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

Achievement in art, craft and design is satisfactory.

- Students' progress from broadly average starting points is satisfactory. Their achievement in GCSE and A-level examinations is satisfactory, though fewer students achieve the highest grades than is seen nationally. Their ability to revisit and refine work, by developing greater control of media, is not always sufficiently strong to improve the quality of finish.
- Students use a wide range of two- and three-dimensional media competently. They use and manipulate formal elements, such as line, tone and colour, appropriately in preparatory work and final pieces. They explore a variety of approaches to drawing, incorporated into each project, such as working directly from observation, memory or imagination.

However, their drawing skills remain underdeveloped because they have too few opportunities for more extended drawing.

- The most successful work is supported by effective exploration of ideas and visual research in sketchbooks. However, many students' sketchbooks are too preoccupied with the presentation of images and written work, at the expense of recording ideas and developing personal responses. While students are encouraged to make regular reference to other artists' work this is too often confined to pasting images in to books and annotating with biographical information. The better examples show that students are able to demonstrate what they have learned from looking at other artists' work through personal, visual and written responses.
- Most students enjoy the subject, especially when they have opportunities to make personal choices about their work, for example, in choosing the theme, subject matter or media. They enjoy opportunities to work with different media and processes, but are sometimes initially tentative when trying out new ways of working. Students respond well to the clear requirements of project briefs, but are too often content to meet minimum requirements, rather than considering how they might extend their work.

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

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

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge effectively to devise varied and interesting practical projects and introduce students to the work of a wide range of painters, sculptors and architects. Staff know individual students well and ensure that the work is well matched to their capabilities.
- Lessons are well prepared and students are provided with clear information about what they are expected to do and achieve in the lesson. However, sometimes lessons get off to a slow start, when the teachers' introduction is overlong.
- Teachers regularly check students' understanding of key terms and specialist vocabulary, and encourage them to build on prior learning through reference to previous lessons. Occasionally, reviews at the end of lessons focus too much on the completion of task or processes, and not enough on more evaluative critique of the qualities within the work. Questioning is not always extended sufficiently to draw out more detailed or analytical responses from students.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Formal assessment at the end of each project gives students a clear understanding of the level or grade they are working at, and written feedback on what has gone well and points for improvement. The subject leader acknowledges that assessment practice is less consistent in Years 7 to 9 than for students taking examination courses. Written comments give praise for what students have done well, but are not sufficiently precise and detailed on what students need to do to improve their work and reach higher levels or grades.

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

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

- The curriculum provides a good range of creative activities which include different approaches to drawing, painting and printmaking, as well as three-dimensional construction, modelling and ceramics. Students are introduced to design related work through projects based on comic strips, animation and architecture. Teachers revise and adapt the curriculum regularly to ensure it engages students' interest.
- While the department has previously had some productive community partnerships, many of these have not been sustained, due to changes in external circumstances and funding. Students have opportunities to exhibit work in the local arts centre, and while some students have benefited from working with artists in the school, such opportunities are not regularly built into the curriculum. Teachers encourage students to visit local artists' studios and exhibitions during the Dorset Arts Week events.
- Students on GCSE and A-level courses enjoy visits to art galleries and exhibitions, which are carefully planned to link closely with specific practical projects. However, students in Years 7 to 9 do not currently have such visits built into their programme.

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

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

- The subject leader regularly tracks students' progress towards expected targets, and knows which students are making the expected progress and those at risk of underachievement. Where students are making less progress than expected, teachers monitor attendance and completion of work closely and provide additional support through lunchtime or after school sessions. This has proved beneficial for some students, but school leaders are aware that there is scope for raising achievement further, particularly in the attainment of higher grades and levels.
- Analysis of performance data does not extend to how well students perform in different units or in achieving specific assessment criteria, to enable the school to pinpoint areas for development more sharply. The school has not developed a subject specific action plan to address areas for improvement identified in the subject evaluation.
- Given the small size of the department, timetabling constraints mean that it is often difficult for teachers to find time together to plan and assess work or share ideas and good practice. There are few opportunities for teachers to undertake subject specific staff development, although managers acknowledge that visits to other centres would be beneficial in their bid to raise achievement in the subject.

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

- Raising students' achievement, particularly the attainment of higher grades by:
  - strengthening the development of students' drawing through more structured teaching of drawing skills from the start of Year 7 and increasing opportunities for students to develop sustained approaches to drawing, where appropriate
  - supporting students to develop their sketchbook as an effective tool for personal research, recording and developing ideas, and ensuring their work shows the impact of their study of other artists
  - ensuring that teachers' questioning and plenaries are effective in extending students' thinking and developing their critical and evaluative skills
  - ensuring that assessment feedback provides sufficiently detailed and specific guidance on how students can improve their work and achieve higher grades and levels
  - increasing opportunities for students to see artists' work at first hand to enhance their understanding of how creative practitioners work
- Increase the rigour and effectiveness of subject self-evaluation through:
  - closer analysis of students' achievement in specific aspects of work to pinpoint more accurately where improvements are needed
  - developing a subject specific action with clear and measurable targets for improvement and rigorously monitoring progress towards these
- Identify more opportunities for teachers to work together, to share ideas and good practice within the department and with external partners.

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**