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Mr D Powell
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Dear Mr Powell

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 6 and 7 July 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 four lessons, including one jointly observed with you. The visit also included an opportunity to evaluate a community sculpture project.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is good. GCSE work in ceramics is consistently an area of outstanding success.

- Between Years 7 to 9, students develop a strong interest in the work of different artists, craftworkers and designers and show enthusiasm for their practical experience of different media. Around half choose to take an examination in the subject, above the national average.
- Boys and girls at the school do well at GCSE in the subject in relation to their other subjects. While students' start below average academically, their track record of performance in the subject is in line with the high national averages. Girls achieve particularly well in attaining A* or A grades.

- Students' craft and design work are strengths. They use ceramics skilfully and creatively, often decorating surfaces with exquisite designs. Their research is well presented and highly effective, particularly where photographs of their three-dimensional work are integrated.
- The quality of two-dimensional work is more inconsistent, reflecting widely variable confidence in drawing. Digital technology is underused. However, some very effective work is achieved where students experiment with surfaces and media, enjoying the physicality of large-scale work.
- The commitment shown by many students is impressive. From the start, they mirror the preparation of their teachers by searching out resources for lessons. Some of the older students produce an extensive collection of work. A good proportion progress to art-related courses post-16.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- Staff create a caring, supportive and stimulating environment. They show interest in the students' development as young people as well as young artists. As a consequence, students build their confidence, an observation made by several parents who wrote strongly supportive letters.
- While digital technology is underused as a teaching tool, there is good management of other resources to ensure that lessons start purposefully and progress briskly. Students learn how to take increasing responsibility for working routines because staff explain clearly their methods in preparing for the lesson or organising a demonstration.
- Students receive regular feedback about their overall progress. There is further scope to focus on specific skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure that all students exploit their strengths and tackle their weaknesses. However, a good balance is achieved between praise and encouragement, and marking directed at 'even better if'.
- A strength of the teaching is the skill with which difficult concepts are made easy to understand. The best lessons ensure that different abilities are equally challenged. For example, in the Year 8 lessons observed the teacher used her knowledge of students' prior attainment well to create still life 'Cubist' compositions with varying levels of complexity.
- Staff participate actively in sharing and developing teaching approaches across the school. The subject teaching observed successfully applied whole-school strategies, for example, involving students in signalling the level of intervention. The school's priority to embed literacy across the curriculum is clearly evident in the frequent references to specialist words.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Students are introduced to the work of a wide range of artists, craftworkers and designers. From the start, students are taught how to use the work of others as inspiration, while valuing their own ideas.

Students learn about the work of creative practitioners inspired by the locality, for example Barbara Hepworth, and contemporary practice.

- Two-dimensional skills are introduced well through a range of graphic techniques that create an 'artist's tool box' to select from in future work. The variability in quality and confidence of students' later drawing indicates that they would benefit from continued opportunities to revisit and refine their use of the visual elements. While the use of digital media is underdeveloped, the use of three-dimensional media is a strength.
- Opportunities to work with practising artists, craftworkers and designers are uncommon but where they exist they are used well to build on existing strengths, evident in the community sculpture project. Students' best work often reflects an understanding about how the work of others was created. The galleries visited help students analyse methods and media.
- The topics experienced by students include the natural and built environment, human experience and imagination. As they progress through school, some students particularly value opportunities to pursue individual ideas and express personal feelings. However, cross-curricular and issues-based starting points are at an early stage of development.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- The development of the subject is promoted by: a highly experienced and effective subject specialist who contributes to college-wide leadership and management; a committed and passionate specialist who connects well with the students; and a community arts leader who is starting to widen the impact of the subject by using the arts to promote community cohesion.
- Teaching and the impact on students' achievement are monitored and evaluated well through a range of evidence. Analysis of performance data, lesson observations, learning walks, work scrutiny and staff peer observations are established. Exhibitions of work are used effectively to review standards and create a sense of occasion and pride for the students.
- The community arts improvement plan contains clear priorities, actions and success measures for the subject. The views of students and their parents inform improvement planning. Further improvements and initiatives that are shared across art forms, for example the Arts Award scheme, are areas ripe for further development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the standard of students' two-dimensional work to that achieved in three-dimensions by:
 - developing regular opportunities for students to use drawing experimentally and analytically

- increasing opportunities for staff and students to use digital technology creatively and purposefully
- evaluating students' progress in relation to subject- specific skills, knowledge and understanding
- maximising the impact of the subject by:
 - helping students to make connections between the subject and other aspects of their learning
 - widening opportunities for students to explore and respond to issues of personal interest and concern
 - identifying and exploiting opportunities to work collaboratively across art forms.

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