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19 October 2011

Mr P Smart
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Smart

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 3 and 4 October 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 nine 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.

- From above average attainment on entry, students make satisfactory progress during the two year Key Stage 3. Their attainment is above average by the end of Year 8, notably in drawing and painting and in their critical understanding of the artists they learn about. In lessons, students are enthusiastic but do not always understand well enough the key features of successful work to enable them to fulfil their potential.
- An average proportion of students continue with the subject at Key Stage 4. They make good progress over the three year course and attainment is above average in GCSE examinations. However, their performance is weaker than in most other subjects across the school. Most students seek to develop individual and interesting responses to projects. They work hard but in some cases are unable to fully realise their ideas because they

lack experience in a wide enough range of techniques and processes to be able to select the most appropriate.

- Numbers taking advanced level study are small relative to other subjects. Girls join and make up about half the total. Students make good progress and results in AS- and A-level examinations are above national averages. They explore personal ideas thoughtfully through their work, and written pieces are of high quality. Progress in practical work is sometimes outstanding, notably in painting where students have built secure skills over time. Work is less well developed in processes such as sculpture of which students have had less comprehensive experience over time.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teachers are enthusiastic, enjoy good relationships with students and have high expectations. Lessons are logically structured. Sketchbooks are used well to encourage students' independent work. In fine art disciplines such as painting, teachers confidently extend students' learning, making links to artists and demonstrating techniques. However, their specialist knowledge does not include some key areas such as contemporary craft.
- In lessons, tasks are usually made clear to students so they know what to do. However, at Key Stage 3 there is sometimes insufficient clarity about how to achieve high-quality work or how this relates to students' targets. This hinders students in taking a lead in developing their work and the pace slows. A greater focus on individual tuition with older students lessens the impact of this, enabling teachers to clarify their goals and boost learning.
- Teachers make good use of assessment data about examination students' varied attainment so as to plan tasks to meet their differing needs. For example, sixth form classes enable students to use different materials or artefacts. Students' progress toward targets is monitored carefully and triggers good intervention, including additional sessions if any fall behind.
- At Key Stage 3, these features are not embedded. Teachers do not always adapt lessons fundamentally enough to challenge students of varying ability, including in questioning, or check their progress. Students have ambitious long-term targets but are unclear about what they mean because they are not referred to enough by teachers in class or marking.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Key Stage 3 provides experience of a sound range of materials and techniques. Students use a good variety of two-dimensional processes such as drawing, painting and print. However, there is too little systematic experience of three-dimensional work, including craft, or creative use of computers. As a result, students do not see the subject's full breadth to find where their strengths may lie and encourage more to study it further.

- Key Stage 4 and sixth-form students respond well to the project themes set, and to having greater responsibility for the direction of their studies. There are more opportunities for three-dimensional work, using computers and photography than at Key Stage 3, although these are not developed systematically enough. The students' positive response to a recent artist-led wire workshop shows the potential for future development.
- Reference to the work of other artists is rightly a regular part of students' learning. They value and understand the purpose of this well. Older students have good opportunities to visit galleries and most sixth-form students visit exhibitions independently. Younger students do not benefit from such opportunities. Students as a whole have too few opportunities to see creative practitioners modelling the creative process at first-hand.
- Curriculum enrichment is satisfactory with some good features. Life drawing after school is valuable with all sixth form and some more able Year 11 students attending regularly. Students are encouraged to enter competitions such as for local youth. An after-school club offers a useful opportunity for students to develop their work but not all, especially younger ones, are aware of it or what it offers so do not take advantage.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- Subject leadership is motivated to move the department on and makes a satisfactory impact. Some effective actions are taken to improve student outcomes. For example, better targeted intervention helped reverse a drop a year ago in the numbers of GCSE students gaining high grades. However, in areas such as broadening the curriculum and improving teaching some weaknesses are not tackled sufficiently rigorously.
- A satisfactory range of monitoring evidence, including lesson observations, data analysis and work scrutiny, is collected. The evaluation of this yields a reasonable picture of where provision needs to be improved but there is a lack of precision in identifying what aspects of lessons should be better.
- Development planning contains challenging overall goals for students' achievement and focuses reasonably well on the priorities emerging from subject evaluation. However, it is not always clear how the impact of actions taken will be checked so as to quickly refine them when necessary and accelerate the pace of improvement.
- Teachers have satisfactory subject expertise with good knowledge and skills in some areas of the curriculum. However, the small size of the team presents a challenge in giving students good opportunities across a wide range of disciplines. While there are some useful links with other schools locally, neither these nor other external partnerships, such as with artists' organisations, are exploited fully to support subject development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the impact of teaching, especially in Key Stage 3 so that:
 - lessons fully challenge students of all abilities
 - students always know how to improve their work to meet their targets
 - teachers check progress in lessons and intervene if it is too slow
- broadening the curriculum to give:
 - systematic experience of three-dimensional work, including in craft, and of the creative use of computers from Key Stage 3
 - opportunities for Key Stage 3 students to visit a gallery and all students direct experience of creative practitioners at work
- improving the impact of subject leadership by:
 - focusing closely on the aspects of teaching requiring improvement and checking the difference made by the actions taken
 - making more use of external partnerships to develop subject provision.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design in the school.

As 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

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector