

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



19 October 2011

Mr N Fox
Headteacher
The Cottlesloe School
Aylesbury Road
Wing
Leighton Buzzard
LU7 0NY

Dear Mr Fox

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 and 29 September 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 six lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is good.

- Students are very enthusiastic about their experiences in the subject and make good progress. They look forward to their lessons, valuing opportunities to explore creative approaches. Well-planned and interesting projects enable students to develop and improve their practical and critical skills over time, and they acquire good habits in using sketchbooks to create lively and colourful pages of visual research which creatively combine drawing, collage and text.
- Despite a marked increase in the proportion of students achieving higher National Curriculum levels by the end of Year 9, the proportion achieving

A* and A grades at GCSE has been below average for the last two years. Most students refer to the same artists and the more able and confident students are not always encouraged to work independently by seeking out their own references and developing a more distinctly personalised approach. Some students do not always work up pieces sufficiently to achieve high levels of finish.

- The small number of students who study art and photography in the sixth form work increasingly independently, choosing personal themes and less well-known historical and contemporary references that promote depth of enquiry. For example, one student exploring the dark, expressive work of Francis Bacon produced an excellent sequence of work, combining images of historical and contemporary figures, culminating in a series of powerful self-portrait images, which very successfully combined drawing, painting, digital manipulation and distortion that explored portraiture expressively.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- Teachers plan lessons carefully to ensure that students with different abilities and levels of confidence progress well, for example, by providing different stimuli for drawing exercises. Teachers are very effective in developing students' confidence to work on a large scale and explore a variety of media and techniques.
- Teachers' practice of working through each project themselves, producing sketchbooks with an excellent array of worked examples, inspires students to try new ideas. Extensive displays of students' work in art rooms and public spaces around the school provide further sources of inspiration as well as celebrating students' achievement.
- The use of a focused task to assess students' drawing skills and creative approaches at the start of each year during Key Stage 3 enables teachers to know students' individual strengths or weaknesses and to monitor their progress closely. Teachers routinely share assessment objectives and grading criteria so that students know how to assess their own progress and level. This, along with regular marking and feedback, helps students to know what they need to do to improve their work and achieve higher grades.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Students explore a good range of predominantly two-dimensional media, including printmaking and digital media, though the school acknowledges opportunities for students to explore three-dimensional work are more limited. The creative use of digital media is good at GCSE and strong in the sixth form, but less well-developed at Key Stage 3.

- GCSE and sixth-form students benefit from visits to galleries or museums, but younger students have fewer opportunities to do so. However, students in Years 7 to 9 have participated very enthusiastically in the school's 'Artweek' project, benefiting greatly from opportunities to work large-scale, across the curriculum, and with a variety of creative practitioners who enabled students to evaluate original work at first hand.
- Project work has a clear emphasis on observational drawing but fewer opportunities to develop more imaginative or expressive responses. Photography students make frequent and creative use of the immediate locality to record and develop imagery for individual projects, but recording at first-hand from nearby locations is less well-developed in art.

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 leader has successfully adapted whole-school improvement policies to the subject context, including successful strategies for developing critical and reflective thinking, and improving literacy.
- Teachers share their good practice through consistent approaches to planning and by developing exemplar material together. Staff are increasingly confident in using performance data systematically to set targets and monitor progress, resulting in early identification of underachievement and swift support for individual students. However, although subject self-evaluation identifies overall strengths and areas for development well, attainment and progress are not analysed in sufficient detail to highlight any overall differences in performance by different groups of students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of students achieving A* and A grades at GCSE by:
 - supporting more able and confident students to work more independently and to personalise their work more strongly
 - providing opportunities for students to re-visit and improve pieces of coursework
 - enhancing students' drawing skills by increasing opportunities for imaginative, expressive drawing and work on location
- enabling all students to benefit from first-hand experiences in museums or galleries and a broader range of approaches to three-dimensional work
- using available performance data to sharpen subject evaluation further to target specific areas and focus actions for further improvement.

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

Janet Mercer
Her Majesty's Inspector