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Mr G Turner
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Turner

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 2 and 3 November 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: discussions with senior staff, the subject leader, the 'Connecting Youth Culture' team and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of seven lessons, including two which were jointly observed.

The overall effectiveness of art, craft and design is satisfactory with good features

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is satisfactory with good features.

- Between Years 7 and 9 students make satisfactory progress in developing their subject knowledge and skills from a wide range of starting points. Boys and girls enjoy opportunities to explore unfamiliar media in two and three dimensions, and develop interest in a range of topics. Their ability to review, revisit and refine ideas or techniques is less well developed. A typical proportion of students choose to take a GCSE option in the subject.
- Examination results are broadly average overall, but, following successful strategies to address underachievement in 2008, boys achieve particularly well in relation to national trends. A small proportion of students attain A*

or A grades. While digital media is underused, students' handling of drawing, painting, printmaking, collage and sculpture is competent and creative. Recording observations and interpreting imagination are strengths.

- Students interviewed expressed strongly supportive views about the value of their experience in the subject; opportunities to show originality, work practically in contrast to their more academic subjects, and gain confidence by responding to open-ended challenges, were common factors. Not all students were convinced that topics in Years 10 and 11 enabled them to express personal feelings and emotions sufficiently through the subject.
- A good proportion of students continue an art-related course post-16. Their confidence to work at a large scale, draw experimentally, and interpret the work of different artists, craftworkers and designers selectively, prepares them well. Less well developed is students' first-hand use of stimuli, including art galleries. While students present their research sheets well few exploit sketchbooks, for example as a creative journal.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- Staff use their specialist expertise and up-to date subject knowledge effectively to plan lessons that engage students' interest. While computer-aided resources are underused, written guidance for students is well presented and successfully prompts students' problem-solving. Relevant displays enhance the classrooms, but are not always used strategically enough to engage students. In a well-managed plenary observed, students selected words from a display to evaluate work using technical language.
- Assessment is frequent and marking is often detailed and constructive. However, the impact of assessment on students' learning and progress is lessened where objectives are not made clear to the students or where there are too many to revisit when reviewing progress. Attainment is accurately assessed by staff and students, but specific strengths are not clear enough to promote specialisation or students' best in examinations.
- Information about students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is used well to target intervention; support staff contribute to the inclusive quality of lessons, often evident in the confident response of students to whole-class discussion. Additional challenges for highly creative students or strategies that enable academically able students to apply their wider skills are inconsistent aspects of teaching.
- Teaching about new techniques and tools is a strength; staff balance the promotion of care, control and creative risk-taking well. The involvement of students as demonstrators also promotes their confidence and leadership skills, compatible with the recent introduction of Arts Award.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum enables students to learn about a wide variety of artists, craftworkers and designers, very well related to the work of contemporary practitioners. For example, Year 8 students were observed comparing and contrasting the dynamics of colour, composition and surface explored by Matisse, the author and illustrator Eric Carle and graphic designer Kate Slater. Topics appeal to students' interests particularly well in Years 7 to 9.
- The breadth of two- and three-dimensional media is wide, although the use of digital media is underdeveloped. The range of processes that students are able to learn about motivates boys and girls. For example, different groups of students respond equally well to the printmaking projects that enable them to apply their abstraction skills to an increasingly challenging scale and method of working. The impact on achievement is evident.
- Students have in the past visited art galleries and worked with visiting artists. Particular exhibitions are connected well to courseworks. For example, a visit to Manchester City Art Gallery linked directly to the focus of Year 9 students on Surrealism. Opportunities to design for a real purpose in the local community are a further strength. Nevertheless, students' cultural experiences out of school are not always exploited.
- Opportunities to gain accreditation in the subject have recently broadened to include the Arts Award alongside the general GCSE course. This is beginning to promote connections between visual and performing art forms. Despite memorable examples of cross-curricular work enjoyed through Arts Week that were shared by the students, some opportunities are missed to make regular links with other subjects, including those in which students do particularly well.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- A good track record of involvement in community projects combined with the imminent development of a local arts centre on-site, positions the department very well to take a lead across the area. For example, a recent renaissance initiative in Bedale shows effective partnership work between the school, the town and district councils, and professional artists. Visionary plans are now supported by access to excellent resources.
- Links with schools and colleges are purposeful and productive, for example in informing students about options post-16. A very successful initiative to improve the performance of boys involved a visiting college student whose talk about his work provided an inspiring role model. The modesty of staff sometimes limits the confidence to lead innovation, for example by exploring the commercial possibilities of students' excellent printmaking.

- Subject self-review is accurate and often perceptive. For example, recent strategies to increase the quality of drawing are proving effective. However, improvement planning does not always prioritise, clarify actions or success criteria, for example related to the observation that students' prior experience of evaluating, refining and improving their work on entry in Year 7 is inconsistent and sometimes a barrier to higher achievement.
- The views of students, their parents and carers, are used to inform improvements. For example, topics that interest different groups of students have evolved through consultation. The expertise of staff is deployed well, for example leadership by the technician of the Arts Award scheme. Successful participation in Artsmark has also started to define the distinctiveness of particular art forms, and added value of combined work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of boys and girls attaining the highest grades by:
 - identifying highly creative students early and challenging them continuously, including through specialisation where appropriate
 - increasing the use of digital media in teaching and learning
 - teaching students how to review, revisit and refine existing skills and deepen prior knowledge, drawing on creative practitioners' pursuits
 - supporting students in making links with other areas of their learning or with their out-of-school experiences, to promote personalisation
 - developing an area of innovation to share with others in the educational and arts community, contributing to the development of the arts centre as a beacon of excellence.

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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector