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Mr A Packer  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Packer

### **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 5 and 6 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 five 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 enjoy art lessons, valuing opportunities to make personal choices about their work and to explore their own ideas and interests. However, despite teachers' encouragement to experiment with different approaches, many students lack confidence in their own abilities, and their caution about making mistakes in their work impedes their progress. Where students are more confident and creative in their approach, they produce good drawing and first-hand research with frequent references to other artists. However, too many students do not complete the tasks set, or pay enough attention to detail or quality of finish to achieve higher grades.
- The proportion of students achieving the higher National Curriculum levels in Year 9 has improved in recent years, but remains below that seen nationally. This indicates satisfactory progress in relation to their below

average starting points. The proportion of students achieving higher grades at GCSE remains below the national average, particularly for boys.

- Sixth-form students work more confidently and independently. Regular individual dialogue with teachers helps them make good progress. AS and A-level results improved markedly last year with a high proportion of A and B grades. Students receive useful advice when applying for art and design courses, but have limited knowledge of specialist pathways and career opportunities in the creative industries.

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

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

- Teachers' enthusiasm contributes to good relationships with students, who value the good support from teachers, both in and outside lesson time. Teachers plan varied and interesting projects, explain tasks clearly and provide good practical demonstrations and examples of work, which helps students know what they need to do.
- While teachers are well informed about students' different needs and abilities, they do not always tailor the tasks or resources in lessons to suit students' differing ability. Students usually have the same tasks, though in one lesson, the teacher provided different handouts which supported students with varying levels of ability and confidence in drawing. Most students concentrate well in lessons, but occasionally a small minority do not pay close enough attention to their own work, or teachers' instructions, and their behaviour distracts others and slows progress.
- Teachers share learning objectives and assessment criteria with students to help them understand what they need to do to achieve their targets and improve their work. Opportunities for self- and peer-assessment in lessons are sometimes too rushed to enable students to benefit fully from sharing feedback and discussing their work. Teachers mark work regularly and make constructive comments to help students improve, but do not check rigorously enough whether students have responded to improvement points. Sixth-form students benefit from teachers' individual attention and regular verbal feedback, which helps them to improve their work.

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

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

- The curriculum offers a good range of two-dimensional and some three-dimensional media, including design briefs as well as fine art approaches. In Years 7 to 9, students use the excellent specialist computer suite to manipulate digital imagery and text, though the use of digital media is less evident in Key Stages 4 and 5.
- While drawing is included in each project, curriculum planning does not explicitly identify how students will develop and build on these skills each year. There is a clear emphasis on observational drawing but fewer opportunities to develop more imaginative or expressive responses.

- Students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form benefit from well-planned gallery visits, studying at first hand art works relevant to their own projects. The residential visit to London for sixth-form students provides an excellent opportunity for personalised research. However, no such opportunities are available to students during Key Stage 3. While younger students sometimes see students' or artists' work in the school gallery, not enough regular use is made of this resource, or the sixth form art studio, to promote their understanding of how other artists work.
- The school has recently introduced a vocational art and design course at Key Stage 4, to better meet the needs of those students not well-suited to GCSE study. While students are enjoying the work on this course, it is too early to determine its impact on raising attainment.

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

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

- Staff work closely together to plan and review the curriculum, sharing resources and practice. The department has a strongly inclusive and supportive ethos. However, the commitment to providing high levels of support and care for individual students sometimes takes precedence over ensuring that all students are sufficiently challenged to improve the quality of their work to meet required standards for GCSE.
- Subject and senior leaders' analysis of performance data accurately identifies the key priorities for improvement. However, while the subject development plan indicates clear targets for raising higher level achievement at Key Stage 3, targets are not included for Key Stage 4. It does not indicate how the required improvements will be achieved, what the success criteria is, or how and when progress can be monitored.

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

- raising attainment, particularly the achievement of higher grades at GCSE and the higher National Curriculum levels in Key Stage 3 by:
  - insisting that students complete all set work and ensuring they improve the quality of work by responding to feedback from teachers
  - improving the quality of coursework, by creating opportunities for students to re-visit and re-work pieces where necessary
  - ensuring that boys achieve as well as girls
  - ensuring that teachers challenge students sufficiently to improve their work by tailoring tasks and resources to meet students' different needs and abilities
- enabling all students to benefit from first-hand experiences in museums or galleries and to develop their understanding of how creative practitioners work

- planning for progression through the curriculum, so that students can build on and strengthen their skills, for example, in drawing, over time
- using available performance data to sharpen improvement planning further to target specific areas and actions for 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**