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Mr M Fowle
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Fowle

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 7 and 8 December 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 and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 10 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.

- Boys and girls enjoy their work in the subject. The proportion of students opting to take a course in Years 9 to 11 is rising.
- Vulnerable students have developed positive attitudes to learning through strong working relationships built within the department.
- Few of the students who do not continue with the subject after Year 8 reach the National Curriculum levels expected at the end of Key Stage 3.
- The proportion of students attaining A* to C GCSE grades in relation to national averages is inconsistent, but is generally below average for boys.
- Talented students do well. An above average proportion of students gain A to A* grades. High numbers progress to post-16 art-related courses.

- Students taking accredited courses are making good progress; heightened levels of individual interpretation and confidence with scale are evident.
- Handling of textiles and two-dimensional media show increasing control and creativity but three-dimensional and digital media are used infrequently.
- Students' knowledge of creative practitioners is adequate, but often teacher-dependent. Deeper understanding is evident where they have reflected on first-hand experiences, including visits.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- Although good lessons were observed, the impact of teaching on the learning and lasting progress of different groups is inconsistent.
- Staff develop an excellent rapport with the students. Their strong interest in, and enthusiasm for, the subject promotes students' enjoyment well.
- Short demonstrations are handled skilfully to help students understand learning objectives, without limiting creativity by prescribing an outcome.
- Not all computer-aided teaching resources are of the same standard, but the best inspire students by combining imagery and text powerfully.
- The quality and use of display are variable. In one studio, students' use of technical language reflected the strong presence of information displayed.
- Of the assessment approaches used, students consider teachers' individual feedback that pinpoints strengths and sets challenges the most effective.
- Too much planned for the time available sometimes limits learning, for example by giving answers too readily at the expense of questioning.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Cross-curricular links are developing but there are not enough to support delivery of the Key Stage 3 art, craft and design curriculum in two years.
- Opportunities for students to pursue GCSE Fine Art, Textiles or a BTEC course in the subject meets a wide range of students' needs.
- Visits help to accelerate students' progress. For example, trips linked to the textiles course makes up for limited experience prior to starting GCSE.
- Reference to contemporary work has increased recently. However, students have insufficient opportunities to work with artists, craft makers and designers.
- A recent school fashion show illustrates students' support for enrichment activities. Department plans indicate that more are planned for the future.
- A Year 7 student who shared follow-up to a lesson using her iPad showed that plans to increase students' access to digital technology are promising.

- An effective curriculum model seen in action linked the work of famous artist Hundertwasser to local artist Tula Moon, which added authenticity.
- Themes designed to widen appeal are proving effective. For example, the 'altered books' project inspired by war and conflict interests boys and girls.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- Improvements in the quality, diversity and maturity of work achieved by different groups of students, particularly in Year 11, show that since starting at the beginning of the year the subject leader has prioritised well.
- A satisfactory range of evidence, including joint observations and scrutiny of work, informs self-evaluation but data are not analysed critically enough.
- Staff share a passion for the subject but have different skills and levels of expertise. Development planning does not always make clear enough the professional development required to address inconsistent achievement.
- Current building work to replace existing facilities with purpose built studios represents an excellent opportunity for innovation in the subject.
- The department does not yet have a vision statement and strategy in place to show how the new facilities will make best practice in the subject common.
- Subject teaching by the senior leader linked to the subject considerably strengthens communication between different levels of leadership.
- Links with post-16 providers have a positive impact on provision, but sustained partnerships with galleries or practitioners are at an early stage of development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the performance of boys and girls to levels that are consistently at or above national standards by:
 - ensuring that the curriculum in Years 7 and 8 enables students to make well-informed choices about future courses and careers
 - increasing opportunities for students to explore digital media and work on a large scale in two- and three-dimensional media
 - increasing students' first-hand experiences, particularly through work with visiting artists, craft makers and designers
 - analysing the progress made by different groups systematically, supported by professional development and sharing of best practice

- developing a shared vision and implementation strategy that fully exploits the new facilities and capitalises on the enthusiasm of staff and students.

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