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Mr P Monk
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Dear Mr Monk

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 with Elizabeth Macfarlane on 26 and 27 January 2012 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 documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 20 lessons, including two jointly observed.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is good.

- In Years 7 to 9, students enjoy a wide range of opportunities to use different media and methods. They develop positive attitudes in the subject, are attentive and work at a good pace. An above average proportion of students choose to take a qualification in the subject.
- The range and depth of students' current work indicate good progress. Girls' attainment is rising consistently, reaching above average standards at GCSE. Above average attainment for boys is less consistent. A small proportion of boys and girls attain A* or A grades.
- Experimentation, particularly on a large scale, emerges through students' later coursework. However, the diversity and ambition of their earlier work

is sometimes constrained by students' limited first-hand experience of the work of other artists, craftmakers and designers.

- As students progress through the school they gain confidence in expressing individuality through their interpretation of subject matter and media. Sixth form work in textiles, photography, graphic and fine art is highly creative and secures good progression into higher education.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- Teachers share their enthusiasm for their specialist media passionately, fostering a sense of curiosity and enjoyment. Good subject knowledge enables staff to refer to particular artists, craftmakers and designers whose work exemplifies the concepts that students need to understand.
- Staff are beginning to exploit computer technology as a teaching tool. For example, in one lesson students were able to refer to projected images of their drawings while handling potentially messy clay. In another lesson juxtaposing two contrasting images challenged their critical skills well.
- Departmental planning is thorough and individual lesson planning takes account of the needs of groups and individuals through differentiated resources. Well observed and timed intervention by teaching and support staff contributes to good lesson pace.
- Teachers know students well and relationships are very professional. Information about students' progress is conscientiously recorded through a well-developed monitoring system. However, assessment information is not always maximised to target specific improvements likely to raise standards further. The impact of peer assessment is lessened by closed questions.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The 'carousel curriculum' establishes a good foundation of subject skills, knowledge and understanding for students between Years 7 and 9. A successful transition project between Years 9 and 10 enables students opting for the subject to combine their experiences.
- Overall, curriculum continuity is an area to strengthen, to ensure that students capitalise on links between different disciplines, and develop depth as well as breadth of experience to reach the highest possible standards as they pursue specialist areas.
- The curriculum is clearly relevant to students; different applications of the subject are explicit. For example, students explore different purposes of graphic design in response to a design brief. Opportunities to talk to, and learn from, creative practitioners adds authenticity to the curriculum.
- Regular involvement by an internationally known local artist, and work inspired by direct reference to the locality is balanced successfully with

opportunities to learn about distant cultures. Nevertheless, not enough students benefit from visiting art galleries early on.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- The quality of provision is consistent because monitoring is effective. A good range of school-based sources of evidence are referenced. However, the impact of provision on outcomes is not always evaluated sufficiently to target improvements or identify the need for external stimuli.
- The annual art exhibition is a highlight in the school calendar and successfully contributes to the strong community engagement promoted by sports and performing arts. In line with the work of these subjects, the department is keen to develop more student leadership through the Arts Award.
- A strength of the subject team is the balance between shared approaches to course management and diverse areas of subject expertise in which individual staff have the opportunity to develop leadership. In addition, creative practitioners are used judiciously to extend the range of provision.
- Senior staff value the subject and recognise the strong motivation of subject leadership to prepare students well for their futures. For example, provision of a sixth form studio and industry standard suite for digital work show that a convincing rationale for improvements meet with support.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that boys and girls make equally and consistently good progress, increasing the proportion of A* and A grades by:
 - enabling all students to gain further inspiration by visiting an art gallery
 - ensuring that students are clear about how to pursue the depths of thinking and creating, to attain the highest possible standards
 - evaluating the impact of teaching on achievement within the department and with other providers of art, craft and design education
 - establishing more curriculum initiatives that promote continuity.

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