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Mr A Boyle  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Boyle

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit with Michael Maddison HMI on 1 and 2 February 2012 to look at work in art, craft and design and history.

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 leaders and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observations of 12 art and nine history lessons, two of which were jointly observed. There was also a visit to an assembly linked to Holocaust Memorial Day.

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 their work in the subject. As they progress through the school they relish opportunities to express visually, their personal feelings, insights and imagination. Sixth form work is often deeply reflective.
- From below average starting points, students make satisfactory progress. Students who are more able in the subject reach average or above average standards at GCSE and A-level. Girls overall attain higher grades.
- In 2011 the achievement of boys and girls at GCSE and A-level improved and compared favourably with their other subjects. However, standards are inconsistent between years and groups.

- Students are strongly motivated by public exhibition of their work, for example the annual fashion show. Exceptional achievement includes work at the Saatchi Gallery and an entrepreneurial student who sells his work.
- Confident drawing, colour work and construction underpin the best work in textiles, two- and three-dimensional media. Weaker work relies too heavily on secondary images and makes insufficient use of digital media.
- The impact of gallery visits on students' knowledge and understanding in the subject is evident from Year 10. Nevertheless, in Years 7 to 9 students' underdeveloped evaluation skills contribute to below average standards.

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

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

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent but satisfactory overall. During the visit, good features included teachers' enthusiasm, their relationships with students, effective use of digital resources, and imaginative activities.
- The most effective teaching establishes clearly and simply the learning objective, through words, demonstration or examples of work. In these lessons, students are able to review their progress independently.
- Overall, assessment is a weaker aspect of teaching. While praise encourages students, limited constructive criticism, particularly marking, restricts students' knowledge about specific improvements to tackle. This is reflected in the quality of students' self-criticism and peer-evaluation.
- Challenging dialogue with individual students promotes depth and diversity of work, particularly in the smaller post-16 classes. However, there are too few opportunities for talented students, including sixth formers, to boost confidence and raise aspirations by sharing their work with other groups.

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

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

- The recent introduction of an innovative arts curriculum in Years 7 and 8 promotes students' enjoyment and independence. However, the focus on developing students' basic subject skills, including drawing and making, is not yet strong enough to quicken progress and raise standards.
- The theme of 'identity' is a dominant strand that provides continuity across all key stages. The visual concept of 'pattern' is similarly revisited. This provides a sound model to expand the range of themes and concepts. Links with other subjects, including performing arts, are underdeveloped.
- Curriculum enrichment is a strength, particularly for students taking an optional course. Creative practitioners visiting the school and visits to art galleries contribute to students' deepening understanding of the subject. Vocational links are also promoted by projects related to a real purpose.
- The range and use of media are exciting post-16 and reflect students' expanding knowledge of artists, craftmakers and designers, particularly

contemporary practice. However, opportunities are missed to connect students' and artists' practice, for example in using sketchbooks.

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

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

- The subject impacts positively on the school through events and displays that celebrate students' achievements. However, critical evaluation is a weaker aspect of subject leadership, particularly that focused on identifying and addressing inconsistencies in provision, including teaching.
- Links with the community are used effectively to enrich the curriculum. The recent development of a sixth-form centre provides an excellent stimulus for further interaction with the local and arts community. Work with schools that are high performing in the subject is at an early stage of development.
- Reflecting the whole-school management structure, there is sound deployment of cross-faculty responsibilities. Subject staff are keen to underpin this by taking further responsibility for subject initiatives. Additional after-school and Saturday workshops are existing examples.
- Improvement planning has helped to sharpen the focus on raising standards. However, the actions required and success criteria are not clear enough to support staff in their efforts to meet the needs of all students, particularly the wide range of ability and experience on entry to Year 7.

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

- raising standards for all groups of students, particularly boys by:
  - ensuring that the quality of teaching is consistently good
  - establishing a stronger foundation of subject skills in Years 7 to 9
  - providing clear feedback to students about how to make improvements
  - deploying resources and responsibilities to maximise impact, supported by a clear and rigorously monitored improvement plan.

The overall effectiveness of history is good.

### **Achievement in history**

Achievement in history is good.

- Although attainment is broadly average, students make good progress at all key stages.
- At Key Stage 3, students are developing a good knowledge and understanding of the topics studied. When given the opportunity in lessons to discuss and debate, they explain their ideas clearly and provide appropriate evidence to support their opinions.
- At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, results are improving. Students make good progress and some make outstanding progress. Students enjoy the courses and being challenged in their work.
- Students have good chronological understanding; they investigate sources well and some have a good understanding of utility. Their understanding of how we might check the accuracy of accounts and sources, why people and events are significant in history, and why different interpretations must be handled with care is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at GCSE and in the sixth form.
- History makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Students have positive attitudes to learning, behave extremely well in lessons and work well together and on their own. More students, especially boys, are choosing to take history at Key Stage 4 and it is now the most popular optional subject in the college at GCSE.

### **Quality of teaching in history**

The quality of teaching in history is good.

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to help students make links with their previous learning. They have high expectations and they are enthusiastic and reflective about their work. Relationships between staff and students are good and this helps to facilitate good learning.
- Lessons are organised well and teachers use a variety of tasks to maintain students' interest and engagement. Teachers' use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning is good. However, students' use of ICT is limited and opportunities are not always taken to exploit this technology fully.
- Although lessons at Key Stage 3 are usually well paced, teachers are sometimes too keen to pass on their knowledge to students and to move on to new learning. As a result, they do not give them sufficient opportunities to assimilate, discuss and reflect upon what they are learning.
- Excellent support is provided for examination groups. Students appreciated the advice given by teachers and their willingness to provide additional materials and to explain points in a different way to help

understanding. This helps to explain the good achievement and improving results at GCSE and A level.

- Marking is variable. Where it is most helpful, it provides students with effective guidance. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students are given detailed advice but, at Key Stage 3, too many comments on students' work lack subject-specific guidance.
- Where teaching is most effective, lessons are tailored to suit the topics studied and to meet the needs of all students. In these lessons teachers used ongoing assessment skilfully to ensure that students made at least good progress. However, such effective practice is not yet embedded across the department, particularly at Key Stage 3, where teachers' expectations and the level of challenge provided are not always aligned closely enough to students' needs.

### **Quality of the curriculum in history**

The quality of the curriculum in history is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 covers a range of topics, from the early medieval period to the late 20th century. However, not all aspects of the programmes of study are covered in sufficient depth. For example, the curriculum does not give enough attention to answering key historical questions through enquires which combine depth, overview and thematic studies, and to developing the full range of students' historical concepts and processes as they move through this key stage.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form promotes students' academic development well. At A-level, students enjoy studying topics which are different from those studied at GCSE.
- Students' written literacy is well developed in history, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through studies of the slave trade and the Holocaust. Overall, though, cross-curricular links are underdeveloped.
- Students interviewed spoke of how much they had enjoyed visits to historical sites, such as the residential visit to York in Year 7. However, curriculum enrichment opportunities are too limited.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in history**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in history is satisfactory.

- The head of department is enthusiastic and well motivated. He leads a team of teachers who have high aspirations, are passionate about the subject and are keen to impart their enthusiasm to the students.
- The department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Teachers benefit from teaching in adjoining rooms, cooperate well and are encouraged to share good practice.
- Although self-evaluation is accurate, it gives a rather superficial view of strengths and areas for improvement. Some monitoring and evaluation

procedures are undertaken. However, they have not led to sufficient improvements for the students at Key Stage 3 where a lack of consistency of practice exists in the quality of teaching, marking and the use of assessment.

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

- developing assessment practice and feedback at Key Stage 3 to ensure that
  - in lessons, expectation and challenge are more closely aligned to students' needs
  - students are given sufficient and precise subject-specific advice on how they can improve their work
- improving planning for progression at Key Stage 3 so that teachers and students have a clear understanding of how they can develop the full range of key historical concepts and processes across the curriculum
- strengthening provision at Key Stage 3 by ensuring that the curriculum covers a sufficient range of topics through a combination of depth, overview and thematic studies
- strengthening monitoring and evaluation procedures to ensure greater consistency of practice in teaching, marking and the use of assessment at Key Stage 3.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design and history 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**