

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



19 March 2012

Mrs C Tooze
Headteacher
The Herts and Essex High School and Science College
Warwick Road
Bishop's Stortford
Herts
CM23 5NJ

Dear Mrs Tooze

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 March 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: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of nine lessons, including four jointly observed; and visits to lunchtime Art Club and Arts Award sessions.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is outstanding.

- Students are highly committed to the subject and express their enjoyment openly. They work confidently with a wide range of media, processes and on a variety of scales in response to observational, imaginative and cultural starting points.
- From Year 7, students develop individual, personal and original responses to themes and demonstrate excellent knowledge of artists, designers and craftspeople, enabling them to contextualise their own work with maturity and understanding. Students regularly review, critically analyse and evaluate their own work.

- Students display high levels of visual literacy within their work. Drawing skills are developed very effectively through the strong emphasis given to direct observation. Life drawing workshops increase the confidence and analytical drawing of sixth form students. Sketchbooks show a breadth of ideas and experimentation and form a record of the students' artistic journey.
- Skills in working three-dimensionally are well refined. The Year 10 'shrunk heads' outcomes are produced to a notably high standard.
- All students make outstanding progress in Years 7 to 9 to meet or exceed their targets. In Year 9, high numbers work towards the Arts Council Bronze Arts Award and the proportion of students opting for GCSE is well above average. Attainment at GCSE is rising with the proportion of students achieving A* or A grades consistently well above the national average.
- The proportion of students opting to follow A-level courses in the subject is rising, including many boys and girls who join the school to do so. The Year 12 'mini foundation' course promotes the development of key subject skills well. Sixth-form work shows a high level of independent thinking and reflection. However, a modest proportion of A* to B grades are attained.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- Teachers are passionate about the subject and inspire students through their enthusiasm and wide knowledge. Lessons are brisk paced, innovative and fun, frequently including elements of surprise. One student spoke of 'expecting the unexpected in art'. Teachers develop students' creativity and individuality effectively through encouraging experimentation and promoting the belief that students of all abilities can achieve well.
- Teachers' demonstrations are of high quality and they use information and communication technology effectively as a teaching tool. For example, scanning the students' three-dimensional responses to looking at geodes introduced a new starting point for exploring ideas in relation to their examination preparation. Visual displays helpfully include evaluative comments and quotes by the students. This promotes curiosity and establishes high expectation as to what can be achieved.
- Teachers consistently plan challenging tasks, introducing students to a diverse range of historical and contemporary practice to extend their knowledge and understanding. Great importance is placed on teaching and developing practical skills and students respond to varied starting points and themes with confidence and fluency. Homework tasks are used effectively to extend skills and deepen understanding.
- Teachers know students well and relationships are very professional. Students feel well supported and challenged. They know their targets and the extent to which they are meeting them through regular verbal feedback and assessment. However, written targets for improvement are not always detailed or precise enough to make higher standards explicit.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum is well planned to ensure that students build on a very secure foundation of key subject skills, delivered through both 'materials based' and 'thematic' starting points. Extensive opportunities for drawing, working with different media and techniques and exploring the work of diverse historical and contemporary artists, craftspeople and designers exist. Printmaking is a particular area of strength and experienced by all age groups. Although access to digital media is limited its use as a creative tool is encouraged and used effectively within the work of individuals.
- The subject makes an important contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Challenging subject matter and sometimes controversial themes, such as 'war and conflict' or the notion of 'beauty' are presented and explored intelligently and sensitively. Work-related practices of contemporary practitioners are considered, for example Year 8 simulate factory production of Takashi Murakami inspired motifs and explore the relationship between designers and manufacturers.
- Gallery visits enrich the curriculum for Years 10 to 13 but are not systemically planned for students in Years 7 to 9. Students are well informed by their teachers about local and national exhibitions and are encouraged to visit galleries independently, which they do regularly. Residential trips to Europe and beyond have broadened students' horizons and provided stimulus for their work. Opportunities to work with artists enhance learning, for example, the sixth form students participate in printmaking workshops at the Curwen Studio and life drawing classes through the Royal Academy Outreach programme.
- A range of lunchtime activities is well supported and many students opt to work for the Arts Award, which is offered to Gold level. The department engages with national initiatives such as Face Britain and the Saatchi/Sunday Telegraph Art Prize to provide opportunities to show students' work nationally.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- The subject leader has developed a strong and positive departmental ethos. The impact of the subject is evident through display across the school and within the community where the annual AS and A2 exhibition at the local Rhodes Gallery is an established highlight of the year. The school's virtual learning environment is used creatively to encourage students and staff to regularly debate works of art in a discussion forum.
- Monitoring and evaluation are rigorous and accurate. Development plans address identified areas for improvement, set challenging targets in relation to outcomes for students and support a long-term vision for the

department. Staff have already revised aspects of the sixth form curriculum to raise students' attainment further.

- Staff development is a priority and the recently appointed newly qualified teacher and ITT students experience high levels of support and guidance. The senior leadership team empowers staff to take risks to develop innovative teaching and learning. The department uses connections with local and national arts and education networks and professional development opportunities to refresh and share specialist subject skills and knowledge. This subsequently informs curriculum planning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of students in the sixth-form attaining the higher grades by developing detailed written feedback that sets clear aspirational targets
- developing opportunities for students to visit a gallery or exhibition as part of their curriculum experience in Years 7 to 9.

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

Elizabeth Macfarlane
Additional Inspector