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Miss C Herman  
Headteacher  
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Dear Miss Herman

### **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 with Ian Middleton HMI on 8 and 9 February 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 12 lessons, including one jointly observed.

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

#### **Achievement in art, craft and design**

Achievement in art, craft and design is inadequate.

- Achievement is inadequate because the gap between girls' and boys' attainment in the subject is too wide. While girls make satisfactory progress, boys make insufficient progress to reach the standards attained by their peers nationally. Current assessment information indicates a continuing trend of underachievement by boys.
- The proportion of boys and girls attaining GCSE A\* or A grades is improving but remains below average. A small proportion of students continue with the subject in the sixth form. Few boys are recruited.
- The proportion of students attaining A or B grades at A-level is well below the national average. Not all students make the expected progress given their starting points and academic ability. Although students enjoy the

subject their work is not deeply informed enough by the work of creative practitioners, for example through regular visits to art galleries or studios.

- The strongest achievement in all years draws on investigative approaches, showing spontaneity and improvisation through to completion. The Year 8 'drawings in wire', and Year 11 'Cubist assemblages' are exciting examples of work that follow exploration outside the confines of a sketchbook.
- Students' enjoyment in using a breadth of media and their growing confidence in drawing contributes to satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9. The proportion choosing to take a GCSE in the subject is above average. However, the separate gender and ability groupings of students have not had sufficient impact in closing the wide gap in achievement at GCSE.
- Sketchbook work in all years is often conscientious and well presented. However, students are not always able to show continuity in the development of their ideas or sufficient interpretation of their experiences. Final outcomes often fail to capture the spontaneity of preparatory work. Bold portraits inspired by mark-making in a Year 12 lesson observed showed how this can be addressed. The creativity and impact of students' work in the lesson was greater than that achieved in longer projects.

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

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

- The teaching observed ranged from good to inadequate. In the weaker lessons, teachers' expectations of what students can and should achieve are too low. At GCSE not enough use is made of the knowledge about different groups gained in previous years, to ensure that students' individual interests are pursued or diverse needs are met.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is sound and demonstration is used informatively. Nevertheless, not all staff exploit fully or share effectively their specialist skills. For example, high-quality prints created by staff contrast with low-level expectations with regard to students' printmaking.
- Not enough emphasis is given to teaching students how to refine their skills. Too often, poorly timed peer-assessment activities interrupt periods when students are working intensively. Conversely, where the pace of lessons slows, often when students are researching ideas, staff do not intervene or adapt their teaching regularly enough.
- Insufficient use of the learning environment is made to promote students' curiosity and independence and to raise their creative aspirations. For example, students' limited use of annotation mirrors the displays that are unaccompanied by information. Students' management of resources is too reliant on the teacher or technician. This inhibits students' independence and responsibility for their own work.
- Where progress is satisfactory or better, teachers effectively use constructive criticism and challenging questioning to encourage students to explore the unfamiliar. However, the use of assessment is variable, ranging from detailed marking and personalised guidance to lessons where students remain unclear about what or how to improve.

- The good teaching is characterised by clear and concise learning objectives, visually stimulating resources, efficient management of time-limited tasks and relationships that promote students' enjoyment and determination. These features are not consistent across all lessons.

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

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

- The curriculum is inadequate because the needs and interests of different groups of students are not met. In particular, students have insufficient opportunities to gain inspiration through direct experience. Although work-placements with local artists have started to have a positive impact on the work of some sixth formers, not enough students are given opportunities to work with visiting practitioners, or respond to a 'live' brief, including those taking the 'applied' option.
- Students' knowledge and understanding of art, craft and design are constrained by their limited cultural experiences in Years 7 to 9, for example through a visit to an art gallery or exploration of multiculturalism. This contributes to students' dependence on their teacher later on. The fascination expressed by Year 7 students into the work of Hundertwasser and view of a Year 9 student that stereotypes about local culture should be challenged through the subject, show interests that should be pursued.
- A satisfactory range of themes encountered in Years 10 and 11 is enriched by visits to art galleries. In the sixth form, reference to contemporary practitioners is a particular feature of improved provision. However, the impact is lessened because the depth of experience required to promote critical understanding is promoted inconsistently thus diluting the contextual experience within which students develop their own ideas.
- Students are introduced to a wide range of three-dimensional media including ceramics, wire and papier-mâché as well as traditional two-dimensional media. However, students have limited opportunities to develop and apply their interest and skills in digital media.
- A stronger emphasis and more creative approach to drawing, for example through a discreet unit of work in Year 9, is proving effective in helping students to communicate imagination. Other good initiatives include sixth form life drawing and enrichment linked to the national 'Big Draw' scheme.

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

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

- Leadership and management have not been effective in addressing the poor achievement of boys and in ensuring that teaching is of consistently good quality. Despite some good teaching within the department and high standards attained in other arts subjects within the faculty, provision in art, craft and design is too variable. As a consequence, too many students, particularly boys, do not reach their targets in the subject.

- Recent whole-school improvement strategies introduced by strong role models of leadership and management at senior level, are proving effective in the subject. For example, more rigorous assessment monitoring has started to identify, and meet the needs of, underachieving groups. While there is still much more to do, the impact on improved GCSE A\* and A grades is evident.
- Informative displays of exemplary work and leadership by more able students, for example through the Arts Award scheme, are not used strategically enough to promote high standards. Despite this, an end of year exhibition and a recent group mural inspired by the artist Michael Craig Martin are examples of initiatives that have succeeded in making a positive impact on the wider school community. Networks with the wider subject community are nevertheless at an early stage which limits awareness of important strategies capable of accelerating improvement.

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

- raising achievement, particularly of boys at GCSE and students in the sixth form, so that:
  - standards are consistently in line or above those attained nationally
  - finished work successfully captures the creativity and spontaneity of preparatory work
  - their subject skills, knowledge and understanding are applied to a range of purposes
- improving the consistency of teaching so that in all lessons:
  - visual communication promotes students' curiosity and resource management promotes their independence
  - clear and concise lesson objectives set high expectations and promote challenge for all students
  - activities are tailored to meet the needs of different groups
  - constructive feedback is provided and follow-up is pursued
- enriching students' curriculum experiences to include:
  - opportunities for students in all key stages to experience first-hand the work of artists, craftworkers and designers
  - creative use of digital media
  - a breadth of cultural experiences
- increasing the impact of subject leadership by:
  - establishing clear responsibilities for staff in relation to maximising specialist skills and applying expectations
  - developing robust monitoring and evaluation, supported by judicious improvement planning
  - establishing and using links with other experts in the subject.

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.

Yours sincerely

**Elizabeth Macfarlane**  
**Additional Inspector**