

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr S Hillier  
Headteacher  
The Gryphon School  
Bristol Road  
Sherborne  
DT9 4EQ

Dear Mr Hillier

### **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 Daniel Burton HMI on 20 and 21 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: discussions with senior staff, the subject leader and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 15 lessons, including four jointly observed with the deputy headteachers.

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 make good progress in handling a range of two- and three-dimensional media. Their confidence and creativity in drawing grows markedly in response to well-structured and well-informed teaching. Although students do not always build effectively on the valuable experience that many bring from primary school, their enjoyment of the subject is reflected in the rising proportion opting to take a qualification.
- Students taking GCSE and BTEC courses present their ideas very effectively. Their sketchbook skills, range and scale of work contributes to good achievement by boys and girls. The standards reached in 2011 were above national averages and compared well with students' other subjects.

Dependence on secondary sources contributes to a below average proportion attaining A\* to A grades. However, high grades are increasing.

- In the sixth form, students make outstanding progress, particularly in photography where starting points are average and high grades are consistent. Observation and imagination, experimentation and refinement with ideas, tools and techniques, combine very effectively across all courses. Students develop excellent critical and evaluative skills.
- Discussions with students indicate that positive views about the subject are common, with the best teaching promoting very strong interest and commitment. They understand the meaning and importance of creativity and drawing. In all key stages, students particularly value lessons that provide opportunities for personal reflection, collaboration, and involve physical and visual challenges that contrast with their other subjects.

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

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

- Examples of creative practitioners' work are selected thoughtfully and shared effectively to inspire students. In addition, work created by other students or the teacher helps make expectations clear. However, objectives designed to challenge more able students in the subject, often additional tasks, do not focus enough on refining skills or deepening knowledge. In the outstanding lessons observed, every student worked at a swift pace.
- Resources are used effectively, computer technology having a strong impact in the sixth form where projected images of students' work in progress, supported by probing questioning, stimulate group evaluation particularly well. In one lesson, the transformation of the classroom into an artists' studio was greatly enjoyed by the students as their large-scale work enabled them to work expressively and spontaneously.
- Demonstration by the teacher engages students' interest and promotes their enquiry skills well. At the start of a very successful lesson, the active involvement of Year 7 students in the demonstration enabled the teacher to focus on observing and questioning other students. However, opportunities are missed for students to record and recall their learning, for example through sketches and notes made during demonstrations.
- Good relationships exist between staff and students. Students value their teachers' subject knowledge which is used particularly well when examples of creative practitioners' work are shared in response to the unexpected. Individual feedback to students, through discussion and written notes, is precise and constructive. Students understand how to improve their work.

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

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

- A successful feature of the subject curriculum is the reference made to contemporary artists, craftmakers and designers, and their historical

influences. The model effectively engages students' interest in a wide cultural range. Their personalised work early on inspired by Grayson Perry and Shephard Fairey promotes their own sense of being an artist.

- Topics are thoughtfully selected to provoke students' imagination and promote different forms of drawing. For example the 'body lab' project in Year 11 combines first-hand and secondary experiences, and drawing with graphic and three-dimensional media. In all years, the curriculum reinforces the development of students' drawing skills very well.
- Visits to art galleries are established for students from Year 10. National and international galleries are visited. However, in Years 7 to 9 students' first-hand experiences are limited. Some existing opportunities are used well, for example the annual exhibition of examination work. Others are not exploited fully in the subject, for example the visit to the Eden Project.
- The range of opportunities to gain accreditation in the subject is a strength of provision because the traditional and vocational courses offered meet the needs of different groups, evident in the rising numbers of students taking an option. At A level, the photography course, alongside a broad interpretation of fine art, successfully attracts students – from those who are new to the subject to those planning to pursue a subject-related career.

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

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

- Students' performance is analysed regularly and rigorously. Improvements made are well informed by accurate self-evaluation. The strategies used are having a sustained impact on improved recruitment to the subject and improved achievement by different groups of students. Further actions to increase the proportion of A\* and A GCSE grades are having a positive impact on current students' progress towards higher attainment still.
- The teaching team offers a good range of complementary skills and expertise which are deployed effectively. Subject and senior leaders work collaboratively to develop, monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching. However, some variability remains between the good teaching that predominates and the outstanding that has a stronger emphasis in planning and classroom practice on accelerating students' progress and tailoring their learning. The very best teaching promotes high attainment.
- Subject leadership is well informed about local and national initiatives and effective actions are taken to ensure that any insularity is challenged. Local partnerships are particularly well established. For example, joint exhibitions with local independent schools and historic houses enrich the work of staff and students. Exhibitions of work in the doctor's surgery exemplify the approaches used to keep the profile of the subject high.

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

- ensuring that students who are more able in the subject achieve their full potential by:
  - building early on their prior and wider cultural experiences
  - challenging all students to refine skills and deepen knowledge
  - encouraging students to work from their direct experiences
  - spreading the highly effective teaching to all lessons.

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**