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Ms T Fantham
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Dear Ms Fantham

Ofsted 2012–13 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 14 and 15 May 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 five lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is good.

- From average attainment on entry, students make good progress in Years 7 to 9, and in Years 10 and 11 for those taking GCSE. Attainment is above average and has risen over the last three years due to improving teaching. Students' achievement is good overall in the sixth form. For some years progress has been faster in Year 12 than 13, but the better teaching is narrowing the gap securely.
- Boys and girls enjoy the subject and make equally good progress. Disabled students, and those with special educational needs, do as well as others because of the support provided by staff. Students' good behaviour in lessons contributes well to their learning.

- Students develop strong skills in drawing and painting, particularly from observation, and in learning how to use visual elements such as tone and colour to depict what they see, or to convey mood and emotion. They make good progress in combining materials in mixed-media or collage, and are confident in handling different tools, such as for printmaking.
- Students think carefully about how to refine and develop their work. At all ages they are keen to make individual responses to starting points. Older students are largely successful in doing so, making some highly personal pieces. However, in Key Stage 3 they are not always clear enough about how to develop their own ideas and some work lacks individuality as a result.
- Learning from other creative practitioners is valued highly by students, who make good progress in decoding what they see to support their own studies. GCSE and sixth form students make greater gains than younger ones because they visit galleries to see work at first-hand, rather than relying on secondary sources.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- Teachers work well as a team to prepare ideas and resources for teaching. They make effective use of their good subject knowledge to plan practical demonstrations and introductions to work by other creative practitioners.
- Lessons are well managed by staff so that efficient use is made of time and resources. They are confident in using electronic whiteboards to show images so as to stimulate class discussion. Positive relationships between teachers and students mean lessons have a productive atmosphere.
- Teachers have high expectations of students, and lessons provide a good level of challenge. Their support for older students is carefully personalised to develop individual creativity. This is less effective with younger students who are not always given enough opportunity to set the direction of their work, or to take a lead in deciding the features of high-quality work.
- A strong assessment system enables staff to inform students accurately about their progress and the next steps forward. Detailed marking by staff is much appreciated by students and provides the starting point for useful discussions between them in lessons. Display is used well to exemplify work at different levels and support students' self-assessment.
- Teachers' assessment of students' progress during lessons involves a good range of discussion and observation. Teachers confidently intervene to tackle common issues emerging and to share good work, but occasionally miss opportunities to target questions at students based on their ability.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The themes studied are popular with students and adapted well to sustain their interest. This, together with good teaching, means the numbers opting for study, for example at GCSE, are above those in most schools.
- There is a good focus on supporting students' social, moral and cultural development through their projects. Work on contemporary issues enables them to think hard about current and/or personal topics such as the environment or self and identity.
- Students have good opportunities to explore art, craft and design disciplines and use a range of materials and processes. However, they gain too little experience of digital technology as a creative medium.
- The curriculum is well planned to ensure good progression in students' skills and understanding. For example, Key Stage 3 builds well on primary school learning. Students' experiences are logically sequenced as they move up the school, including returning to key areas like drawing to refine their skills. Sketchbooks are used well to provide a record of work, including homework, which students refer back to.
- Regular project links to creative practitioners are carefully planned to cover different genres and contexts in which work is made. Older students have good first-hand access to the work of others during gallery visits, but younger students do not get these useful experiences, and students as a whole have too few opportunities to see creative practitioners at work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- The subject leader sets a good pace for development and works well with her colleagues to aim high for the students. Together they have made a positive impact on outcomes and on students' enjoyment of the subject.
- A good range of strategies is used to monitor subject effectiveness, with work scrutiny, data analysis and lesson observation giving an accurate picture of what needs to be done next. Productive discussion between the team leads to useful refinement of teaching and the curriculum.
- Strategic plans set out appropriate actions to bring about change and most have clear criteria for success so their impact can be checked. Nevertheless, specific aspects of teaching requiring improvement are not always identified sharply enough overall, or for individual staff, so as to focus lesson observations even more and accelerate gains in teaching.
- Professional development is linked thoughtfully to subject needs, for instance attending meetings to remain aware of examination syllabus changes, and to the support of subject staff relatively new to teaching.
- Effective links are made with external sources of support such as a local schools subject network and national collections. Links with locally based creative practitioners are underdeveloped in support of the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing further the impact of teaching and the curriculum at Key Stage 3 by giving students more opportunity to develop their individual creativity
- widening students' curriculum experiences by:
 - making more use of digital technology as a creative medium
 - giving Key Stage 3 students first-hand experience of creative practitioners' work, and students of all ages direct experience of creative practitioners at work
- improving the impact of lesson observations by focusing them more closely on specific aspects of teaching and learning so as to check the impact of development initiatives and define the next steps forward.

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

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector