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Mr P Smith
Headteacher
Blessed William Howard Catholic School
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Dear Mr Smith

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 22 and 23 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 two joint observations with a member of the senior leadership team and the department line manager.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is satisfactory.

- In Year 7, students make inconsistent progress in developing their subject skills and use of the visual elements. However, progress in Year 8 is accelerated due to the impact of the 'learners to leaders' course. Many students work towards the Arts Council Bronze Arts Award and an above average proportion of them choose to take a qualification in the subject from Year 9, although significantly more girls do so than boys.
- Girls make good progress on the GCSE course, attaining standards above the national average. However, boys progress at a slower pace, attaining below average standards. This impacts on recruitment into the sixth form where numbers are low, particularly for boys. Sixth form students' work shows a high level of independent thinking and reflection and an above

average proportion of students attain A and B grades at AS and A* at A-level.

- Students enjoy the subject, especially when they have opportunities to make personal choices about their work, for example, in choosing the theme, subject matter or media. They use a range of two- and three-dimensional media with confidence and explore a variety of approaches to drawing, incorporated into each project, such as working directly from observation, memory or imagination. However, critical and evaluative skills are less well developed.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- Teachers generally have good subject knowledge which they use to devise varied and interesting practical work and introduce students to the work of a wide range of artists, craftspeople and designers. They know their students well and adapt the work to meet the capabilities of different individuals and groups. However, not all staff work to their strengths.
- The quality of teaching is widely variable. Stronger lessons include clear objectives, high expectations and demonstrations that motivate students. However, in weaker lessons the pace is too slow and not always effective in engaging students' interest.
- Lessons are generally well prepared, but do not always build in opportunities for students to self- or peer-assess their work when it might be beneficial for them to do so. Questioning is not always extended sufficiently to draw out more detailed analytical responses from students.
- Assessment is regular and verbal feedback good, giving students a clear understanding of the level or grade they are working at. Students appreciate the individual support and tutorials that are a common feature of lessons. However, written comments are not always precise or detailed enough to make the next steps towards higher standards clear.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum promotes the development of students' skills, knowledge and understanding well in relation to a range of traditional two-dimensional media as well as three-dimensional media including ceramics, card construction and papier-mâché. However, opportunities to experience three-dimensional work are too limited in Years 7 and 8. Not enough emphasis is given to students' interests and skills in digital media.
- Drawing is promoted well through emphasis on working from direct observation. Year 9 students produce confident, large-scale oil pastel drawings of food packaging which inform sculptural developments in response to looking at the work of Claes Oldenburg. Sixth form students benefit from life drawing classes.

- Students' first-hand experiences of art, craft and design are good for Years 10 and 11, with trips to the national galleries and opportunities to work with creative practitioners, which they find inspiring. Younger students and those in the sixth form have too little direct experience of artwork or artists at work to inform and expand their learning.
- The locality is used effectively as a resource and stimulus for work. Students spoke with pride about their experience of creating art in a public space when they undertook a site-specific project at the local train station, creating a link between their school and the values of the Olympic Games.
- Good provision is made to meet the needs and interests of individual students. This includes opportunities to follow BTEC or GCSE courses, and in the sixth form students benefit from self-directed briefs.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- The impact of leadership and management on raising the performance of boys is slow because analysis of performance data does not extend to how well different groups of students perform. Not enough emphasis is given in improvement plans or actions to groups requiring additional intervention.
- Recent improvements that have not yet achieved full impact include the more rigorous approaches to monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning in the subject, and more regular assessment and performance monitoring.
- The subject contributes well to the positive ethos and specialist arts status of the school. The subject leader builds strong links with partner schools and the community and uses these effectively to extend creative opportunities for students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the achievement of boys so that standards are consistently in line with or above those attained nationally
- improving consistency in teaching by:
 - ensuring that written feedback provides sufficiently detailed guidance to make the next steps towards achieving higher grades and levels clear
 - providing opportunities for students to peer- and self-assess their work
 - enabling teachers to exploit their specialist strengths
- enriching the curriculum, to include opportunities for students to:
 - experience first-hand the work of artists, craftmakers and designers in all key stages

- use digital media creatively and a wider range of three-dimensional media in Years 7 and 8.

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