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Mr D A Lowe
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Dear Mr Lowe

Ofsted survey inspection programme-art, craft and design and information and communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my joint visit with Joe Clark, additional inspector, on 04 and 05 December to look at work in art, craft and design and ICT.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons. We also appreciated the well-informed and accurate self-evaluation you shared with us.

Art, craft and design

The overall effectiveness of art, craft and design was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding

- Art, sculpture and design work is well presented and celebrated throughout the school. Students make very good progress in the subject and most achieve very well at GCSE. The proportion of students achieving A*- C and A*- A grades is significantly higher than national averages; GCSE entries increased to 76 in 2005/06, all students were entered and 94% achieved A*-C grades. Examination results have improved steadily over the last six years. In the

relatively new applied GCSE in art and design course, impressively high standards of work in design are evident.

- At Key stage 3, students are responsive, keen learners who enjoy art and feel they are trusted and given responsibility. Year 10 students are confident and make pertinent contributions in evaluating their work in design. Progress is significantly good by the end of Key stage 4; students develop very good skills and understanding of art, craft and design in a wide range of 2D and 3D contexts.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good overall

- Teachers have established an excellent rapport with students who respond with high levels of productivity. Lessons are very well planned and incorporate whole school initiatives in teaching and learning effectively. The best lessons allow exploration of media and ideas to flourish within a strong structure and clear objectives. The plenary is often used effectively to draw out individual reflections on what has been achieved. Procedures for assessment and target setting are thorough.
- Students enjoy using colour but their learning about this area of study is less evident in sketchbook work. The quality and impact of research is sometimes limited by students' over reliance on secondary source material. Design students are particularly well motivated, explore concepts well and develop their ideas expressively through live projects.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good, with some outstanding aspects

- The art, craft and design curriculum enables students to learn about a wide range of processes in 2D and 3D. Research and the history of art and design are integrated effectively into practical activities. There are regular reviews of curriculum content to ensure that students have interesting and balanced experiences. Progression is well planned. For example in Years 7-9 the curriculum includes the acquisition of IT design software skills to support later Key Stage 4 design work.
- The use of practising designers and participation in community projects are outstanding features of the curriculum. Contacts are constantly being developed; projects include briefings from designers, industry or external partnerships with the community. For example, the production and casting of a large scale sculpture for a local hospice, landscape design within the school grounds aided by a landscape designer, and a graphic design project for the aero space industry in Year 10. Exhibitions of students' work in national galleries, for example Tate Liverpool and the Victoria and Albert Museum has developed the confidence of students and raised the profile of the school very effectively.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding

- There is highly effective strategic leadership and management to develop the provision further, as a specialist arts college. The art, craft and design staff consisting of four specialist teachers and a multimedia technician, form a cohesive team. Accommodation and resources have been updated and are now very good. Links are well established with a local sixth form college and other FE providers.
- The school self-evaluation gives an accurate view of the strengths and priorities for further development. Areas identified for improvement at the time of the last inspection have been addressed effectively.

Inclusion

- The subject makes a good contribution to the inclusion of different students; lessons and activities take account of individual abilities; dedicated support is provided for a small number of students.

Subject Focus

- The use of drawing and colour is sensitive with a good appreciation of scale, line and tone. Projects undertaken by 'gifted and talented' students are particularly exciting and encourage group and larger scale working.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- promote further creative development by increasing opportunities for students to work spontaneously
- increase students' use of primary sources to generate and develop research in sketchbooks and homework.

Information and communication technology

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Standards are above average at the end of Key Stage 3 representing good achievement given students' average standards on entry. Students have good basic skills which they put to good use across a range of subjects.
- GCSE results are well above average and students taking this course make good progress and achieve better than in most of their other subjects.
- For the minority of students in Key Stage 4, who do not take an accredited examination in ICT, standards are average in both design work and in basic skills, and their achievement is satisfactory.
- Specialist College status is having a strong impact through the creative way students use ICT to support their learning and improve their standards in art and design, particularly in the applied GCSE course.
- Students enjoy using computers and work well together. They use computers responsibly and maturely.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers make very good use of data to set learning targets which students know and understand. Students use these targets well to help them to improve the standard of their work.
- Relationships with students are positive and supportive. Teachers know their subject well and this impacts positively on students, for example ensuring that consideration of audience is given a high priority when designing presentations.
- Teachers do not always provide sufficient time for lower attaining students to respond to questions in lessons and this restricts opportunities for them to check understanding.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory

- Very good use is made of ICT in art, craft and design and in music to enhance students' work; good use of ICT is also made in other subjects such as geography and personal, social and health education.
- Planning to ensure students develop their ICT capability across the whole curriculum is not robust enough and a small minority of students leave school without a qualification in the subject.
- Extra-curricular support in ICT is good.
- Poor heating and ventilation systems in dedicated ICT rooms occasionally affect how well students learn.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of ICT are good

- Accurate self-evaluation is resulting in improvements in examination results and students' achievement.

- The department makes very good use of data to track students' progress and set and review targets.
- The strategic group responsible for ICT development has a clear vision for the subject. It has identified clearly where resource improvements are needed and how these will be achieved. However, the audit of how well ICT is being used across the school is not up to date.

Inclusion

The subject's contribution to the inclusion of students is good

- This is an inclusive school where all groups of students, including students with learning and/or physical difficulties, make good progress.
- All students have good access to computers outside of lesson times. A survey of students' access to computers out of school has been undertaken and the results are being analysed to identify where extra support is needed.

Assessment of ICT and the readiness of the school for the onscreen Key Stage 3 ICT test

Assessment is good.

- Assessment is very good in Key Stage 3 where students are involved in assessing their own work and that of their peers against national curriculum criteria. They have an excellent understanding of what they have to do to improve their work to gain a higher level.
- In examination classes in Key Stage 4, students know their GCSE targets and assessment is used effectively to identify underachievement.
- The progress of the minority of non-examination students in Year 11 is not sufficiently tracked nor assessed against national criteria.
- The school is not yet ready for the onscreen ICT test and has not participated in the pilot so far because of technical problems in installing essential software. It is hoping to be ready for the 2007 pilot test and to enter the whole of the Year 9 cohort.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- complete an audit of the cross-curricular ICT provision to ensure the appropriate use of ICT to support learning in all subjects
- provide further opportunities for all students to obtain accreditation for ICT in Key Stage 4
- improve the quality of the heating and ventilation systems in dedicated ICT rooms
- ensure that the school is prepared for the onscreen ICT test in 2008.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Tweedie
Her Majesty's Inspector