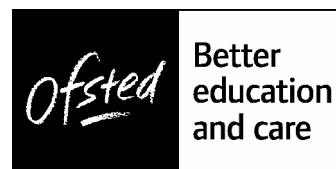


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15 February 2007

Mr P Beighton
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Dear Mr Beighton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 6 and 7 February 2007 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. 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 with pupils and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' and students' work and observation of three lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement, standards and personal development in art, craft and design are outstanding overall.

- Standards at Key Stage 3 are good, with outstanding work in drawing, critical studies and the use of sketchbooks. National Curriculum levels are used well, and reinforce this judgement.
- Achievement is outstanding, with pupils making very good progress across the key stage so that by the end of Year 9 the school can be confident that pupils have reached good levels of skill, knowledge and understanding in art, craft and design.

- Personal development is very strong, reflecting pupils' high levels of interest in the subject. The quality of work seen in folders and sketchbooks indicates a consistent approach to the development of art skills.
- Standards at Key Stage 4 are good, and achievement is outstanding. A high proportion of the cohort takes the subject, and A*-C results are well above national average. Boys achieve very well in art, craft and design and better than is normal nationally.
- Achievement and progress are outstanding at Key Stage 4 and pupils quickly develop high levels of skill in a range of specialist areas including photography and graphics. Photography is a successful option at GCSE with good use made of digital imagery and image manipulation. Often pupils produce high volumes of excellent quality work as in, for example, graphics projects, when they become "hooked" on an interesting theme or idea. Able pupils thrive in the subject, and are encouraged to produce ambitious and creative work.
- Post-16 work is generally of a very high standard, and achievement and progress are outstanding. Students become engrossed in very well chosen and resourced projects which use local resources such as architecture, and universal themes such as the human figure and identity to explore the way art can express emotions, feelings and opinions. Achievement in a good range of specialisms is a strength of the department.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are outstanding overall.

- The characteristics of teaching in the art department are strong subject expertise, very good use of practical demonstration, careful and high quality lesson planning and well sequenced activities, making the best use of relatively short lessons to ensure rapid progress towards well-defined targets. Lessons are very well designed to improve the pace and quality of learning, and teachers use their understanding of the learning process very effectively to predict pupil progress and shape the lesson accordingly.
- Behaviour management is very good, and pupils remain orderly and on task. Teachers mark work well, and use group and pupil-level data very successfully.
- The department works hard and successfully to address the targets emanating from the college's stringent approach to the use of data. Target-setting is very accurate, and pupils know what they need to do to improve. Questioning is used very well to reinforce learning and check understanding.
- Teachers use their art rooms to reinforce their teaching by providing very good quality displays of pupil's art work and plenty of visual materials about art, craft and design in the wider world.

- The quality of learning is a real strength: learners are very interested in the subject and are keen to learn. The whole college emphasises the need to ensure that pupils learn how to learn, and the art department embraces that approach wholeheartedly. Discussion with Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils, and with sixth form students, shows them to be very committed to and well informed about art. They show good and often outstanding levels of progress across a year or key stage, and have a very clear idea of how well they are doing, and what they need to do to meet their targets.
- Increasing maturity allows both Key Stage 4 and sixth form students to express often sophisticated views about the meaning and purpose of art, and its relevance to their lives. The wide range of activities undertaken in art, craft and design including painting, photography, graphics and ceramics gives pupils a broad view of art. This breadth of knowledge is very well supported by the department's close links with local artists and craftspeople, and with local art galleries.
- The sum total of this very good broad provision, which includes excellent teaching, is that learning is outstanding overall. The large numbers opting for art, craft and design at GCSE and post-16 indicate the popularity of the subject and the enjoyment pupils gain from it.

Quality of curriculum

- The curriculum is carefully constructed and gives pupils a suitably broad experience of the subject. This breadth contributes significantly to the very high quality of learning in the subject.
- At Key Stage 3 the curriculum is planned to give pupils experience of a very good range of 2D and 3D media and techniques, including painting and drawing, printing, ceramics, textiles and ICT. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has good critical studies provision, and ensures that pupils gain a sound knowledge of art, craft and design, and use this to inform their own work. For example, a Year 7 group making ceramic thumb pots used imagery from the work of Douanier Rousseau to inspire decorative foliage to add to their pots.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is structured around GCSE courses, and provides a wider than usual range of options including photography, graphics and textiles as well as fine art. The curriculum is significantly enhanced by the provision of these options. Other factors are the tradition of high quality work in the department, the extended possibilities in each activity which skilled teachers are able to present to pupils, and by the influence of outside stimuli such as visiting artists and contacts with local art galleries.
- The high proportion of the cohort opting for art at GCSE (and, within that, the higher than usual proportion of boys) is an indication of the success of the curriculum in meeting pupils' needs and interests.
- The sixth form curriculum is founded on the AS and A2 examinations, with a good range of options including fine art, graphics, textiles, 3D, fashion and photography. The focus given to challenging targets in the

sixth form means that students are encouraged to develop their own interests within the examination framework, in effect extending the curriculum. This can result in work of real depth and quality, as, for example, when a student explores the theme of war in painting, or contrasts ancient and modern architecture through photography. Good references to art from other cultures are made through, for example, a workshop about African art and culture.

- Good provision is made for gifted and talented pupils, and for those with a keen interest in art, craft and design. Extra-curricular projects related to, for example, the creation of props for a school production. Less able pupils and those with special needs have support in the form of teaching assistants and/or differentiated work adapted to their needs. For example, a teacher provided simplified writing frames and drawing templates to help one Year 8 pupil get started on a drawing project.
- Extra-curricular work in art, craft and design contributes significantly to pupils' enjoyment and understanding of the subject, with very good use being made of links with local galleries and artists. A part-time teacher who also works with local galleries provides a very good range of contacts with contemporary art, craft and design.
- Good use has been made of artists in residence. For example, a painter, a ceramicist and graphic designers have all worked with pupils. The Royal Academy one day life drawing course was very helpful to sixth form students in developing confidence in drawing. The department remains open for pupils to work during lunchtimes and after school, with teachers committed to working with pupils who wish to do more of their art work. Pupils are encouraged to think of themselves as artists, and this is very effective in encouraging their commitment to the subject.
- The department has established good links with the local community and develops these as part of the college's business and enterprise outreach brief. Sixth formers work on art activities with Year 5 pupils in a local primary school, and with their teachers on a clay workshop at a local retirement home. Sixth form students are also involved in a project which encourages them to work with their families on an extra curricular art project.

Leadership and management

- This is a very well led and managed department, with a real and inclusive commitment to success for all. A "can do" approach is evident in day to day management of the subject, and the head of art has a clear vision of the way forward for the subject within the college. This includes working to meet the challenging targets set for examinations and levels, and to expand the range of courses at the upper end of the college to provide more vocational courses.
- Organisation of the subject is very good across the art rooms and subject areas. The staff have a complementary range of specialist

skills, but all are versatile enough to be involved in the full range of curriculum areas.

- The management process in art, craft and design is driven by the college's established approach to quality assurance of middle management. Self-review by the department is accurate, and action planning hits the right targets for development.
- The evidence of the outcomes of very good management comes from the good results, the wide-ranging curriculum, the commitment of pupils and teachers to the subject and the thriving atmosphere in the art rooms.
- The college has already invested heavily in improving art accommodation, through the development of ICT and revised darkroom facilities. The college is aware that work surfaces, storage and sinks are still in need of attention, and these will be addressed in the next phase of improvement.

Subject issue: Achievement of boys

The department is very successful in motivating boys. The target-driven approach works well, from Key Stage 3 level targets onwards to GCSE and AS and A2 grades, and boys seem to like being very clear about what they need to do to improve. At Key Stage 4 the options offered, including photography, and the use of ICT within this, and graphics, makes a difference in getting boys hooked on the subject. Recruitment of boys to the subject at Key Stage 4 and post-16 is high. Boys' results at GCSE are above national averages. An example of the motivation shown by boys is a Year 11 pupil whose commitment to his graphics work led him to produce high quality worksheets and sketchbooks, making excellent use of ICT. He was ambitious to become a graphic designer, and was being given good support in developing his confidence in this area.

Inclusion

The wide range of activities undertaken in art, craft and design including painting, photography, graphics and ceramics gives pupils a broad view of art. The high proportion of the cohort opting for art at GCSE and post-16 indicate the popularity of the subject and the enjoyment pupils gain. Good provision is made for gifted and talented pupils, and for those with a keen interest in art. Less able pupils and those with special needs have good support. The department remains open for pupils to work during lunchtimes and after school, with teachers committed to working with pupils who wish to do further work. The department has established good links with the local community through working with artists and art galleries.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to continue to build on high standards and achievement, and to develop the vocational curriculum offer

- to further improve the quality of accommodation
- to ensure that pupils use protective clothing when working with clay.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design in the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Peter R. Jones
Additional Inspector