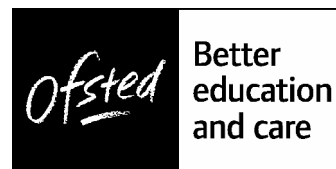


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23 February 2007

Mr Brian Rourke
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Dear Mr Rourke

Ofsted Subject Survey Inspection 2007 - Art, craft and design and
Modern Languages

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit with Judith Toller AI on 21 and 22 February 2007 to look at work in art, craft and design and modern languages.

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 will not be identified individually in the main text. All feedback letters are 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 thorough and well-informed self-evaluation you shared at the start of the visit and the additional opportunities you provided to work with senior staff with relevant responsibilities.

Art, craft and design

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good in Years 7 to 9 and at GCSE and A-level outstanding.

- Students enter the school in Year 7 with widely variable skills in the subject, make good progress and achieve standards in line with or above those

achieved nationally. In both two and three-dimensional work boys and girls develop good technical skills and knowledge about the work of other artists, craft makers and designers. However there is limited evidence of their ability to explore and experiment.

- A high proportion of students choose to continue with the subject to GCSE. They are highly committed and accelerate their progress as opportunities to diversify increase. Students respond particularly well to themes about challenging concepts that provide scope to develop and express their own imagination. Research is thorough, well presented and developed in both two and three-dimensions. However, students tend to revert to two dimensional ideas in examinations that sometimes limit the impact and creativity of their initial thinking.
- A very high proportion of students who continue into the sixth form achieve outstanding examination results and many continue into art related courses and careers. Students clearly build on their strengths in handling familiar media and in some cases combine media creatively with the exception of digital media which is underdeveloped as a creative tool. However, their understanding about the work of other artists is significantly advanced and applied; this clearly impacts on the personalisation of their own work.
- Students in all years enjoy the subject; they respect the expertise of teachers, listen carefully and boys in particular contribute eagerly to discussion. Most students show sensitivity to and interest in the work of others, an ability to review and develop their own work and pride in their achievements, most evident where students have exhibited their work in the nearby gallery at Southport. Students' personal development and well being in the subject is outstanding in most respects including cultural, moral and social development. However, their ability to develop responsibility and show initiative is limited by opportunity, particularly in Years 7 to 9.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good with outstanding features.

- Teachers are knowledgeable about the subject and assessment requirements; they communicate this effectively and show their enjoyment in the subject and working with students at Formby High School. The individual qualities and needs of individual students are known by teachers. However, this could be used to prepare more differentiated starting points. Nevertheless, the tutorials provided for examination students and the accuracy and high quality of marking attached to the work assessed, are outstanding features of provision.
- Lessons are well planned and students are clear about long term objectives. Projects with relevant subject matter and that lead to a clear purpose motivate the students. However, learning objectives for individual lessons are insufficiently clear about what is expected of the students including opportunities for students to diversify.
- The use of the Secondary National Strategy is effective. In particular, students learn how to use specialist language in the subject and lessons often include skilful management of whole class discussion about the progress of their work. The best introductions to lessons provide opportunities for students to see or

handle art and artefacts. Display is well used to inspire all year groups. However, there is inadequate permanent exhibition space in public areas that restricts the development of the classrooms as working studios.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- An excellent range of visits is organised. Opportunities are provided for all students to visit an art gallery as part of their Key Stage 3 course. The exhibitions of examination work in school are effectively used as a teaching resource. Examination courses enable students to visit local galleries in Southport and Liverpool, national galleries in London or events such as 'Clothes Show Live'. European study visits that are offered to the A-level and Key Stage 4 students have a significant impact on the maturity of their work.
- Art, craft and design based themes are broad; the work of other artists, craft makers and designers provides increasing challenge as the students progress through the school. This includes opportunities to work with living artists through the support of Creative Partnerships Merseyside. A wide range of two and three-dimensional media is used with the exception of digital media which is predominantly used for research. Nevertheless, some students are beginning to use computer aided design with other media.
- The most effective topics provide students with opportunities to think deeply and respond individually; the continuous strand of work related to personal identity and experience, for example, shows that students respond well to the structured opportunities to re-visit familiar topics or media. However, although students are given rich first hand experiences, some depend too much on secondary sources. For this significant minority of students sketchbooks are underdeveloped to store and develop ideas, record observations or evaluate experiments in direct response to the stimulus.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good overall with some outstanding features.

- The subject is very efficiently managed and well informed by national initiatives and expectations. It has evident impact across the school and is valued by senior staff. Response to whole school strategies is positive; for example work related to literacy across the curriculum. However, liaison between the arts stimulated by the performing arts status of the school, or with design and technology due to the recent reorganisation of curriculum leadership, are at an early stage of development. A wide range of thoughtfully conceived workshops for local primary schools complement provision at the secondary school. Nevertheless, this initiative has not yet impacted upon students' progression in the subject or their creative development between Years 6 and 7.
- School and subject improvement planning is cohesive. Self-evaluation is used effectively to inform the continuous development of the subject but more specific analysis of evidence could be used to justify judgements made. Nevertheless, examination moderation with other schools is used well to inform

self-evaluation and feedback from students who have continued with art related courses and careers after leaving the school is used effectively to influence the direction of the subject.

- The subject is led confidently, capably and with a clear direction given to students' performance. The tracking and shaping of students' progress is a strong feature of subject management once students are established at the school. The good guidance is a consistent quality of provision that shows how well different teachers collaborate to make best practice consistent.

Inclusion

Boys and girls, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, value the level of support provided by teachers once lessons have started; inclusion is good. The proportion of students choosing art and design courses is significantly higher than national averages. The breadth of the course provides opportunity and success for different students with varied interests and skills.

Subject Focus: depth, breadth and creativity of provision and outcomes

The breadth of the curriculum is an outstanding feature, particularly in relation to the small number of staff. Depth is good overall, particularly evident in themes and media most frequently re-visited. The creative diversity of students' ideas and achievements becomes increasingly evident as students progress through the school and is good overall.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing opportunities for students to build on prior experience by taking more responsibility for the diversification of their work and management of resources from the start
- developing more evidence of students' experimentation with materials and techniques including digital media showing how different processes connect to the work of different artists, craft makers and designers
- improving provision for the exhibition of work and strengthen collaboration with related curriculum areas to ensure that the subject achieves maximum impact on all students.

Modern Languages

The overall effectiveness of modern languages was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good overall.

- Students enter the school with overall prior attainment that is above average.
- The results of Year 9 teacher assessments in modern languages were well above average. This represents good progress. There has been an improving trend over the last four years.

- In 2006 results at grades A*-C and A*-A were above average in both languages. However the proportion of the cohort entered for examination greatly exceeds the national average. This therefore represents good progress overall.
- In Spanish all candidates achieved a grade F or better in GCSE examinations. In French the A*-G pass rate was broadly average.
- In the sixth form numbers entered for examination are low. Standards at Advanced level are broadly average in both languages. This represents satisfactory achievement overall.
- In lessons seen students make good progress at all key stages. They generally speak confidently with usually accurate intonation and pronunciation, although lower ability students are more dependent upon written prompts to communicate in the language being learned.
- In writing students display a good understanding of the patterns in the languages and apply them successfully. As they progress through the school they extend their range of vocabulary and structures well.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good. Students enjoy learning languages and say it is fun.
- Students' attitudes towards learning are excellent and their behaviour in lessons is exemplary. They have a good understanding of how important languages are. This is a major factor in enabling them to achieve well. Both boys and girls are keen to volunteer in class oral work and work very productively in groups, pairs and as individuals. When given the opportunity they take the initiative and take responsibility for their own learning.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge. There is very good practice within the department in the use of the target languages to develop students' listening and speaking skills and to challenge students effectively. There is scope to extend this very good practice across the department.
- Teachers make clear and well sequenced presentations of new language so that students rapidly understand, identify and apply patterns, and use new language successfully themselves.
- Interactive white boards are used well to engage students. Students use ICT themselves on a regular basis, both in and outside lessons, to consolidate and extend their learning at their own pace. Work with the digital language laboratory is particularly successful in motivating and engaging students, especially boys.
- Students increase in confidence and competence in using the languages when they have opportunities to practise informally and use the languages for real purposes. There is scope to develop this further.
- Students are given regular feedback about their work. However there is scope to involve them more fully in evaluating and planning their own progress against assessment criteria specific to language learning goals.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- Almost all students learn either French or Spanish from Year 7 and the most able learn a second language in Years 8 and 9.
- Almost two thirds of students opt to continue with at least one language to GCSE.
- Extra curricular provision is good. There are well established and popular visits and exchanges to France and Spain. Language days and short trips to France also promote cultural awareness.
- Students benefit from regular contact with native speakers of French and Spanish. They particularly value the way they make themselves available to help students outside lessons on an informal basis.
- Teachers are developing good links with feeder primary schools to deliver Spanish lessons to pupils in Years 5 and 6. The department has recently adapted the languages' curriculum appropriately in Year 7 to ensure continuity.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of modern languages are good.

- The subject leaders work well together and have created a culture where language learning is valued and enjoyed by students.
- The department is successful in engaging boys' as well as girls' interest in studying languages both in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form.
- The senior leadership team supports the department well with good resources and promotes language learning well in the school.
- Self-evaluation is at an early stage at departmental level.
- Teachers have access to a good range of assessment information about students. Teachers use it in planning lessons but students are not yet fully involved in evaluating their own progress or planning next steps.

How close the school is to reaching the benchmarks for language take-up in Key Stage 4

- The school has exceeded the first benchmark of 50% as almost two thirds of students study at least one language to the end of Year 11.
- The department has succeeded in creating a culture where learning languages is valued and the school actively encourages students to continue with a language throughout Key Stage 4.

The development of speaking skills

Students' speaking skills are well developed.

- They generally have accurate pronunciation. They can respond promptly and successfully to direct questions in familiar contexts with varying degrees of

support. They are well prepared for speaking tests. When they are given the opportunity to practise informally they grow in confidence.

- By Year 11 students have a good range of language and structures in both French and Spanish.
- There is scope to increase students' opportunities to use the languages spontaneously and for real purposes as well as for rehearsal.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good

- The school offers a caring and supportive environment where individuals feel valued. Relationships between students and teachers are very good. This leads to positive attitudes towards learning languages amongst both boys and girls.
- Almost all students study at least one language to the end of Key Stage 3 and one third study two languages in Years 8 and 9.
- Almost two thirds of students study at least one language to the end of Year 11. Almost all candidates achieve a qualification in a modern language.
- Equal numbers of boys and girls opt to continue their study of a language to Year 11.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using assessment information more effectively on a day to day basis so that students have a better understanding of how well they are doing and how to improve
- increasing opportunities for students to use the languages themselves in lessons, to practise informally and to use the languages for real purposes.

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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector