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Mrs Janet Leigh
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Dear Mrs Leigh

Ofsted survey inspection programme – art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22 and 23 May 2007 to look at work in art, craft and design.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of assessment in the subject and its impact on students' progress.

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 six lessons or part lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good although standards are below average.

- Students respond enthusiastically to the subject, sustaining their work, respecting their time in the department and behaving well.
- From below average starting points students make good progress in Years 7 to 9. They respond well to a range of materials and processes, enjoying the playful development of their handling skills. Good

progress is made in building knowledge of artists and makers. Students are weaker when refining and developing their work and standards remain below average overall by the end of Year 9.

- At GCSE level, the students do well on the three endorsed courses. Standards in textiles are average while those in fine art and graphics are below average. Particular strengths are evident in the development of decorative work, such as in textiles, and in the collection of research material and experimentation with techniques in sketchbooks. However GCSE students also struggle to develop their work independently. In part they are hampered in this by weak use of subject specific vocabulary when discussing their work with teachers and writing evaluations. This restricts their critical analysis of what might be improved so that fewer than average gain higher grades.

Quality of teaching and learning in art, craft and design

Teaching and learning in art, craft and design is good.

- Teachers plan well so that learning builds sequentially. Lessons are interesting, well paced and well structured. Tasks are clearly explained, although the underlying learning is not always made explicit enough.
- Teachers are enthusiastic. They have good subject knowledge, making good use of demonstrations to show processes and of interactive whiteboards to show visual reference.
- Support for students of different abilities is good, especially those who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour. Additional adults provide good support; they know the students well, are well briefed but take the initiative if need be.
- Teachers monitor progress well in lessons keeping students on task; however they do not always challenge students enough over their choices for example to use a particular colour range or viewpoint.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art, craft and design is good.

- Students respond well, enjoying learning with boys and girls opting for the subject in good numbers at GCSE.
- Good progression in learning is ensured through a broad range of materials and processes including good opportunities to use computers as a result of the school's specialist computing and mathematics status.
- Projects are thoroughly researched by teachers and resources are good. Practical stages are very well considered. Nevertheless, in some projects the strong structure provided absolves the students of the need to make decisions and think independently.
- The balance between art, craft and design is well struck, especially at GCSE level through the endorsed courses offered.

- A good range of enrichment activity takes place, including visiting artists working with gifted and talented students and visits to galleries. However, the wide body of students have too little knowledge of contemporary practice and of how artists respond to well established and current issues.

Leadership and management of art, craft and design

The leadership and management of art, craft and design are good.

- Strong teamwork and good communication means that the subject leader understands the major strengths and weaknesses in students' learning. Monitoring and evaluation involves effective scrutiny of students' work, good monitoring of teaching and analysis of over-arching assessment data. The school has good systems for identifying patterns in the achievement of different ethnic groups.
- The outcomes of monitoring and evaluation are used well to set overall goals in development planning, to improve teaching and develop resources. Schemes of work are productively refined and colleagues are trusted to interpret them to suit students' needs. However, the systematic analysis of achievement in relation to different aspects of the National Curriculum or of examination syllabuses is underused when defining areas for improvement and setting sharply focused outcomes for students.

Subject issue: the quality of assessment and its impact on students' progress

This was judged to be good

- Formal assessment of students' progress enables progress to be tracked and underachievement identified. Students know their subject targets and benefit from the use of a consistent school-wide system.
- Students' work shows the impact of assessment, for example marking offers ways forward and sketchbooks show that advice is taken.
- Verbal one-to-one feedback from teachers in lessons is regular and ensures students make good progress. It is the students' most valued form of assessment and is also used well by teachers to adapt lessons to meet students' needs.
- Questioning is effectively targeted to test students' understanding. In some, but not all, lessons it is used to challenge and extend ideas.
- Teachers' verbal and written assessment involves good reference to assessment criteria at GCSE level; in Years 7 to 9 this is less evident. As a consequence, students' self-assessment improves over time.

Inclusion

Inclusion in the subject is good because subject leadership is ambitious for all the students and good progress is made. Boys do slightly less well than girls but this is in-line with the picture seen nationally. Teachers adapt their teaching well to meet a range of needs, including of students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The curriculum has broad appeal and makes reference to the students' varied ethnic heritages in Years 10 and 11, although this is less a feature of younger students' learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve students' capacity to refine and develop their work independently
- give students more experience of contemporary visual arts practice
- make more use of assessment data about students' performance in different areas of the National Curriculum or examination syllabuses in targeting subject development and checking the impact made.

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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector

