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Mr C Van Bussel  
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Dear Mr Van Bussel

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 02 and 03 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 11 lessons or part lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- The students enjoy the subject. They behave well, take responsibility for their work and make good use of their time in and out of lessons.

- Attainment on entry is average albeit with variations in the extent of students' experience of the subject in primary school. They make good progress in Years 7 to 9, showing confidence in exploring the qualities of materials in response to direct observational and imaginative work. The students build good knowledge and understanding, including artists relevant to their projects, although their knowledge of craft and design as areas of creative endeavour is less well developed.
- Year 10 and 11 students also make good progress. Results in GCSE examinations, most notably those of boys, have risen sharply in recent years and are above average. The students develop increasingly personal work in Year 11. There are some examples of excellent practice although fewer boys achieve the highest grades. Year 10 and 11 students make good use of information and communication technology for research and some use it well as an expressive medium. This feature is underdeveloped in younger students' work.
- In the sixth form, standards are above average and progress on both fine art and photography courses is good overall. The students make the best progress in Year 13 through adept refinement of their work to express their ideas. This feature of the Year 13 students' work is less evident further down the school where students find more difficulty exploiting the visual language, through manipulating the materials they use, to communicate emotional responses.

### Quality of teaching and learning in art, craft and design

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

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They work well as a team, sharing resources and ideas while also having the confidence to experiment with their teaching to see what works best.
- The majority of lessons are well paced and ensure that all groups of students make good progress. Teachers are good at engaging students and re-engaging those at risk of losing focus. Central to this are the mutually respectful relationships between students and teachers.
- The students make good progress in lessons because they have a clear purpose and clearly structured practical elements. On a few occasions teachers do not explain key underlying concepts, for example underpinning a particular art movement, placing the emphasis on technical issues rather than why the work might have been made.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art, craft and design is satisfactory.

- The Year 7 to 9 curriculum develops a good depth of understanding, knowledge and skills, but emphasises fine-art based approaches to making. Within this, students encounter a satisfactory range of processes and elements of the visual language in a logical sequence

around interesting themes. The curriculum is weaker in exploring the same themes from craft or design based perspectives. There are some examples of this but not to an extent which ensures a universal breadth of experience.

- Between Years 10 and 13 the curriculum builds well on students' prior experience albeit through predominantly fine-art options. These are popular with both boys and girls. The inclusion of photography in Years 12 and 13 is a valuable addition to subject provision, enabling some students who have not taken art and design at GCSE to work visually and do well.
- Satisfactory enrichment of the curriculum is offered through clubs and visits to galleries for older students and those identified as gifted and talented. However, younger students have too few opportunities to see artists' work at first hand.

### Leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- The subject leader has a good understanding of overall strengths and weaknesses in the subject and works well with her team to move the subject on. Improvements in the standards reached by students, for example at GCSE level, provide evidence of effective action.
- Reference to performance data, including a growing focus on the progress of different ethnic groups and regular work scrutiny, contributes well to subject improvement. The focused analysis of student achievement in relation to different aspects for example of each examination syllabus, takes place informally but is not linked closely enough to the setting of priorities or measurable success criteria in developing provision further.

### Subject issue: The impact of assessment on pupils' progress and creativity

The quality of assessment and its impact on students' progress is judged to be good.

- Assessment is a regular feature of lessons. Effective one-to-one discussion between teachers and students is valued by the students as an effective tool for involving them in target setting and taking ownership of their work.
- Year 10 to 13 students have a good understanding of formal assessment and use this to improve their work. This is particularly motivational for older boys at GCSE level because they can see the progress being made. Year 7 to 9 students know their National Curriculum levels and short term targets but not the key features of the next level up.

- Tracking and recording students' progress has many strengths as well as some weaknesses. Teachers track each student's overall progress effectively. They work well to ensure consistency within the subject in how work is levelled. Year 7 to 9 students receive good written feedback and keep it carefully. The older students receive similarly good feedback but do not store the outcomes well enough, hindering both students and teachers in following up on agreed areas of action.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in the subject is good and students of differing abilities as well as ethnic and gender groups make broadly even progress. The standards reached by the boys are lower overall, reflecting their lower starting points. Students with learning difficulties are well supported in lessons. The curriculum focuses on themes which students find engaging although the emphasis on fine art in Years 7 to 9 restricts students' opportunities to unlock their potential in a broader range of disciplines.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- strengthen the opportunities for students to explore craft and design based approaches within the curriculum, especially in Years 7 to 9
- monitor more closely the students' progress in relation to different aspects of the curriculum in order to focus subject development sharply on those areas where progress is slowest
- formalise procedures for recording on-going assessment activity with students in Years 10 to 13.

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