

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr S Clark  
Headteacher  
Tabor School and Specialist Science College  
Panfield Lane  
Braintree  
Essex  
CM7 5XP

Dear Mr Clark

Ofsted survey inspection programme – art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Christine Dick HMI on 02 and 03 July 2007.

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 the subject leader, senior staff, discussion with groups of students in Key Stages 3 and 4, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and displays and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of art, craft and design was judged to be good with some outstanding features.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good with outstanding achievement at GCSE.

- The drawing assessment used at the start of Year 7 indicates that students have below average ability on entry overall. However, there is little information about students' wider skills, knowledge and understanding in the subject on entry.

- The displays of examination work throughout the school create high expectations of the subject from the start. Students are not disappointed; boys and girls with different abilities respond with interest and enjoyment, make good progress and achieve standards similar to those achieved nationally by Year 9.
- A high proportion of students choose to continue with the subject to examination level. They continue to make good progress but it is accelerated in the area of individual interpretation of themes, underpinned by a significant shift in the range and depth of research. A range of art media is used but nevertheless the majority concentrate on progressing their painting skills. Symbolic use of colour, bold use of abstraction and skilled visual composition are consistent qualities. A very high proportion of students achieve A-C grades, significantly higher than national averages for boys and girls. They do very well in relation to their other subjects.
- Students in all years are attentive, co-operative and express views about the work of others sensitively and thoughtfully. A high proportion of students show their ability to sustain commitment to the subject through continuation with work after school. Their growth in confidence is evident in their ability to explore searching themes and select artists to connect their work to, but it is less evident in their innovative use of different media, particularly ICT.

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

Teaching and learning are good; some elements of teaching are outstanding.

- Teachers use display consistently well as a teaching tool to demonstrate different standards, illustrate what is expected and exemplify specialist terminology. Learning objectives are consistently used but vary in their clarity. However, they are often backed up with well prepared resources or demonstrations. In some instances demonstrations are managed by dividing the group in two but the effectiveness of this strategy varies because the alternative task is not always specifically connected to the learning objective.
- Starting points in lessons are often similar for different abilities but intervention based upon individual tracking of students' responses is good. Students with a wide range of abilities are reassured by the care, guidance and support of staff that makes consistently good use of whole school systems but which at Key Stage 4 is more explicitly mixed with individual challenge. The proportion of lessons taken up with teacher talk to the whole group is sometimes high. Nevertheless, students value opportunities to concentrate on practical work or learn from different teachers and students by supporting the after school art clubs.
- All teachers use ICT as a teaching tool. The impact on learning is most effective when used to illustrate meanings or provoke students' participation in discussion and demonstration. In one lesson observed

the teacher's introduction modelled how to use ICT creatively but students generally restrict the use of ICT to research.

- There is a strong focus on target-setting; whether expressed by students or teachers they are accurate and achievable. For example, examination students are guided to different displays in order to improve their grades. The department are rightly focused on improving the proportion of A\*-A grades and plan to use visits to local colleges to increase the range of evidence at this level. Nevertheless, not enough students have analysed the work of other artists through first hand experience of a gallery visit or artist-in-residence in order to aspire to undiscovered levels of creativity.

## Quality of the curriculum

A good curriculum is provided.

- The curriculum provides students with a range of opportunities to work in two and three-dimensional media across Key Stages 3 and 4. Painting is revisited regularly; students evidently build their skills in this area by working on a variety of scale, using different painting media, using the same media with increasing control and confidence, and sometimes as a basis for mixed-media work. This strand of the curriculum provides a good opportunity for work from observation and imagination. However, there could be a better balance with opportunities to use processes that can involve more 'accidental' or unpredictable imagery such as photography, printmaking or computer-aided work. Students do experiment but it is often as a result of teacher intervention rather than individual initiative.
- Opportunities to develop three-dimensional skills are particularly effective when matched to first hand experience. For example, a Year 8 group visited the Henry Moore Foundation nearby; a gifted and talented workshop involved working in mosaics with a contemporary artist. A minority of students use these experiences as a basis for some adventurous examination work but generally a stronger emphasis could be given to this work for example through direct reference in the curriculum to the sculptures built into the school architecture. Currently, the assessment task and majority of public displays imply to students that greater value is given to two-dimensional work.
- A strong feature of the curriculum is the choice of topics at Key Stage 4 that provides students with opportunities to express their feelings, views, insights, through the subject. Some curriculum projects have also linked with the local community. For example, the murals for the local hospice. However, links with the post-16 curriculum or creative industries are at an early stage of development. These could be used more effectively to balance the now good provision that enables pupils to express themselves, with projects that respond to the needs of others, including the world of work.

## Leadership and management of art, craft and design

The leadership and management of art, craft and design are outstanding

- The subject leader's relentless drive to increase the profile of the subject and raise standards is highly effective; students rate the subject highly, a significantly large number choose to continue to examination level, examination results are now significantly above national averages and other subjects at the school.
- Effective action taken to address the issues raised at the 2003 inspection is indicative of the responsive and efficient approach taken to whole school initiatives and subject issues emerging from rigorous, systematic and accurate self-evaluation. High expectations of the teaching team are matched with leadership by example. Nevertheless, the individual approaches of different teachers are valued and supported. The department is now stimulating improvement in other areas of the curriculum. It is also well placed to initiate subject innovations, supported by a refreshed vision statement that better reflects the energy and thrust that is an everyday reality.
- The calm, positive and productive ethos within the department is highly valued by students; large numbers regularly continue with their work beyond the school day. Other events such as European study visits or community based projects provide further opportunities for students to extend their learning. Partnerships with the creative industries and cultural sector are at an early stage of development. Nevertheless a significant amount of progress is evident overall.

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

- Assessment is well matched to the strands of the attainment target in Key Stage 3 and examination objectives in Key Stage 4. Teachers refer to assessment objectives continuously in lessons and, in many, use examples of students' work to help students understand how to progress.
- Creativity is encouraged explicitly in Key Stage 4 where work is much more personalised than in Key Stage 3. However, the assessment task that is designed and used internally could consider how to capture the indicators of creativity more systematically.

## Inclusion

The department is an example of good practice in inclusion. This is reflected in the high proportion of students with different interests and abilities that choose to spend as much time as possible working in the department after school and through their options. Regular tracking of performance enables teachers to identify and tackle underachievement. Strategies to support students are effective. For example, students write

about the work of other artists analytically due to the specific guidance given. Gifted and talented students are set additional challenges through work with artists or collaborative work other students in response to a set task.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- structure students' progress across a range of two-dimensional, three-dimensional and digital media in order to build on the success of their painting
- increase choice and encourage diversity from the start in order to encourage students to apply their independence and capitalise on prior experiences.

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

Ian Middleton  
Her Majesty's Inspector