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Mrs Mary Smith  
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Dear Mrs Smith

Ofsted survey inspection programme – art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 15 and 16 October to look at work in art 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 and creativity. 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 eight lessons or part lessons.

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

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- The students join the school with above average attainment. During Key Stages 3 and 4 they make good progress so that the standards reached are well above average. In the sixth form the students make outstanding progress on the fine art AS/A Level courses, producing work of exceptional quality. Students taking AS/A Level graphics, albeit a less able group, make satisfactory progress and achieve average standards but the work lacks the ambition and inventiveness of the fine art course.

- The students develop a good command of materials, techniques and processes including mixed-media, exploiting them well to communicate their ideas. The use of narrative features strongly through expressive subject matter and manipulation of the visual elements such as colour.
- Personal development through the subject is good overall. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. The students learn well about how to research and explore ideas. Very good use is made of sketchbooks and many develop highly individual responses to projects through these. Higher attaining students especially flourish in this atmosphere but the less able make slower progress in relation to their potential because they find difficulty in reflecting on their work and defining ways forward.
- The students develop a good knowledge of the work of other artists. Many use this effectively to support their studies and are well aware that reference to others is a valuable source for their work.

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

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge overall. This is particularly evident in fine art disciplines such as painting and drawing. They use their knowledge well to support lesson planning and individual student's work, for example through judicious choice of reference materials and confident demonstration of processes. However teachers lack experience of information and communications technology (ICT) as an expressive medium and do not incorporate it enough in learning.
- Lessons are well paced and activities are exciting, varied and well managed by teachers. The small size of some rooms makes this a challenge although the teachers cope well with this.
- Teachers have high expectations of students, supporting them effectively during practical stages of lessons and challenging them to think hard. Lesson introductions are used well to clarify the tasks to be completed. However teachers do not always ensure that all students, especially the less able, understand what they are learning through doing the tasks or how to assess the progress made.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very positive and support the purposeful dialogue about work which is evident.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- The curriculum is well structured to build learning progressively and to reflect both the school and the students who attend it.
- The department is keen to refine the curriculum over time in order to meet students' needs. This is reflected in developments such as an AS Level course in photography this year and adaptations to projects.

- The students encounter a broad range of ways to make art, craft and design on different scales and in different dimensions with the exception of limited access to ICT. References to the work of other artists and makers are well considered although there is relatively little opportunity to explore contemporary arts practices through their own work except on the A Level fine art course where this is more evident.
- The subject aims to develop the students as individuals. This is reflected increasingly by the end of Key Stage 3 and becomes a strong feature at GCSE level and beyond so that outcomes are individual.
- The fine art curriculum offered in the sixth form is outstanding. Students are supported by a rich range of stimuli, well structured experiences and a careful balance between freedom and structure. The graphics curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory. It introduces students to the essential elements of the graphic language but does not give them enough access to computer packages or a wide enough range of contemporary graphics to stimulate their work.
- Enrichment of the curriculum has some excellent features. The department makes very strong links with local and national galleries, colleges and other organisations. Visits to exhibitions are regular and artists in residence work with a good number of the students. Clubs and extra activities, such as life drawing, are offered and are popular.
- Able students are challenged by the curriculum but the department is keen to extend them further through forthcoming master classes.

### Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The subject leader shows great commitment to the department. He has a strong vision for the future but one which is developed jointly with his colleagues. The subject is valued within the school and is an important part of its identity.
- A good range of monitoring and evaluation, including lesson observation, data analysis and work scrutiny, gives the subject leader an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses. He and the team work hard to improve the subject further and to tackle weaker areas.
- Priorities for subject development are accurate and, over time, have been used for example to refine the curriculum and raise standards. Current subject development planning sets appropriate targets, such as improving teaching further, but does not show clearly how all those involved will contribute to meeting the targets or how the difference made will be measured through focused monitoring.

Subject issue: the quality of assessment and its impact on students' progress and creativity is judged to be good.

- Assessment is used well to measure the progress made by students and establish ways for them to move forward.
- Individual discussions between teachers and students during lessons are excellent. They have a strong impact on learning and are in part responsible for the diversity within students' work because they are encouraged to explore their ideas. Marking is regular, much is of good quality but some does not give enough guidance for improvement.
- Target setting processes ensure challenging targets are set for each student. Formal assessment opportunities are regular and involve both teachers and students. Teachers are working well together to ensure their assessment is accurate and this enables individual students' progress to be monitored fairly and underachievement identified.
- More able students are adept at evaluating the progress they are making and deciding what to do next. Less able students make slower progress because they do not always understand the characteristics of good quality work or the meaning of their long-term target levels or grades. As a result some of their decision making lacks purpose.
- At departmental level, assessment data is used well to identify areas for improvement. However, development plans do not always show how data is going to be used to check that students' achievement in targeted areas has improved.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in art and design is good and all students are encouraged to study the subject. It offers a curriculum which appeals to students, engaging their interest, supporting their personal development and engendering good achievement. The work of all students is celebrated, for example through the wide range of exhibitions held and on-going project displays. Teachers are committed to supporting all students during lessons. They work hard to enable them to access learning, such as through individual discussion, but do not always plan enough support for students of lower ability such as by offering different ways to tackle the same learning objectives.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- enhance the ability of less able students to improve their own work
- give the students more experience of using ICT as a creative medium, especially on the AS/A Level graphics courses
- be more explicit in subject development planning about how priorities will be achieved and the impact on students learning measured.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art 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