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Dear Ms Rogers

Ofsted survey inspection programme - art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16 and 17 October 2007 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 impact of assessment on the progress and creativity of learners. 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 teachers, senior managers and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in art and design are good.

- Students begin in Year 7 with average standards and make satisfactory progress. Teacher assessments indicate that a good proportion of girls reach the expected level by the end of Year 9 but boys do less well. The proportion of higher attainers is lower than expected. Inspection evidence concurs that average standards are achieved overall in Key Stage 3.
- Students make good progress in Years 10 and 11 and reach above average standards in the GCSE exam. The smaller proportion of boys on the course achieve less well than the girls and there is a lower than average proportion of students reaching the highest grades. However,

a higher than average percentage of the cohort pursue the subject to examination level.

- Students in both Key Stages accelerate their progress when inspired and challenged by particular subject matter. Their ability to abstract rich patterns and create visual composition based on a range of stimulating topics is good. However, few students in Key Stage 3 learn to follow independent lines of enquiry or develop a personal response. In GCSE classes the students work on individual projects but demonstrate limited ability to critically examine their own work, and compare, contrast and connect it with the work of different artists, craftworkers and designers.
- Students enjoy the subject and develop a mature attitude that plays an important part in their examination success. They are willing to take on responsibility, but there are few opportunities to help younger students in the art department or to participate in art activities in the wider community.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- The impact of teaching on learning is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11.
- The best teaching enables students methodically to build up their knowledge and skills. This is achieved by using the National Curriculum as a basis for structuring a programme of topics and tasks. Teachers model what is expected of students effectively.
- Teachers use a range of methods to help students learn. Plenary sessions in which students examine each others' work provoked by teacher questioning are particularly successful. Students are beginning to learn how to assess their work against learning objectives but these are not always clear enough in lessons.
- At Key Stage 3, planning takes insufficient account of students' individual ability, experience or interests. There are few opportunities to follow independent lines of enquiry or to work collaboratively and students are given insufficient responsibility for their own learning.
- Teachers have a very good understanding of the requirements of the GCSE course and use this to advantage when directing student support. This is effective for the weaker students but less of a challenge for higher attainers. As a result, some students do not set high enough expectations for their progress and creativity.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in art and design is satisfactory.

- The curriculum enables students to develop knowledge and skills in a range of media through various topics. The scheme of work provides adequate structure to lessons and basis for students' progress.
- The rigidity of the programme inhibits spontaneous developments or individual response by the students, especially at Key Stage 3. Students have too few opportunities as they move through the course

to choose their own medium or subject matter, to experiment or to take risks. Even on the GCSE course, experimentation is usually confined to sketch books and the final piece does not always reflect the energy of the research.

- Students make good use of the internet to find images but too much work is developed from secondary sources. The students' ability to explore through observational drawing is weak but the department has recognised this through self-evaluation; more guided opportunities are planned.
- The use of computers to create digital images is beginning to feature but the department has not taken advantage of the school's 'digital design suite' to get more students involved in using ICT as a creative medium.
- Some GCSE students are planning further education in art and design but in general students are given insufficient insights into the rôle of contemporary arts, craft and design; for example through talking to living artists and craft workers or learning from the way that they work.

Leadership and management of subject

Leadership and management are good.

- You and your senior leaders have a very good vision for developing art and design based on good monitoring and evaluation and a clear understanding of the needs of the students.
- The art department's self-review has revealed both the need to improve observational drawing and to engage boys more to improve achievement. These aspects are being developed.
- The department analyses assessment data and exam results and these are used to set targets. However, this has not been thorough enough to challenge the difference in achievement between higher and lower attainers.
- The line management and professional development of the art department staff are good. The relationships within the department are good and art and design is held in high regard by staff and students
- Because of strong senior leadership and a carefully considered appointment to build on previous successes, it is well placed to improve further.

Subject issue: the impact of assessment on the progress and creativity of learners

The impact of assessment on learners' progress and creativity is satisfactory.

- Assessment has been a school improvement priority, linked to the focus of Technology College status.
- Students know their predicted levels or grades. In Years 7 to 9 they are given National Curriculum levels at the end of each year and GCSE students are given grades for each project and in exams. However Key Stage 3 students do not always know the level they are working at during projects or what they need to do to reach the next level. GCSE

students do not refer to the marking scheme or grade criteria sufficiently regularly to help them assess their own progress.

- Teachers' comments and support in class help students move on and improve their skills. However, marking is insufficiently regular or detailed to set short term targets for students.
- Assessment is insufficiently focused on individual responses to promote students' full creative development. Peer and self-review is not followed up effectively to see if students have carried out recommendations.
- Staff are keen to improve assessment and recognise that more needs to be done to enable students to take more responsibility for their own learning.

Inclusion

- Teachers ensure that all students are fully engaged in lessons and intervene effectively. Students whose predicted grades in the core subjects are low often thrive in the art department. However, the subject is more popular with girls when options are taken.
- Students say teaching can feel 'girl-oriented'. The work modelled is often safe and decorative, rather than risk-taking and expressive.
- The department's self-review and analysis of assessment data has not yet narrowed the gap in achievement between boys and girls or high and low attainers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve assessment in order to set challenging targets more regularly, promote individuality and accelerate progress, particularly for boys and the most able
- develop the curriculum by broadening the range of subject matter and media and enable students to pursue a more personalised approach to learning
- increase reference to contemporary artists, craftworkers and designers and current issues to make the relevance of learning more explicit and deepen students' understanding of the contribution of the subject to future economic well-being.

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

Chris Shaw
Additional Inspector