

11 December 2007

Ms D Nightingale
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Dear Ms Nightingale

Ofsted survey inspection programme – art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 and 4 December 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 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 nine lessons or part lessons.

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

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- From average starting points students make good progress during the two year Key Stage 3 course. They establish a firm base of knowledge and skills alongside an understanding of how to communicate meaning through art. By the end of Year 8 standards are above average but some of the more able students have not fulfilled their potential by this point when their studies in the subject cease.
- About three quarters of the students opt to study art and design in Year 9 where they make very good progress overall.

- During Years 10 and 11 students make excellent progress, with the boys doing particularly well. Students' work is highly diverse and communicates ideas skilfully through manipulation of materials. They work confidently on a variety of scales with innovative use of construction and mixed media. Students inform their work through reference to that of other artists rather than simply working in the borrowed style of someone else.
- The subject makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development. Much of their work is informed by an imaginative, surrealist dimension. This unlocks students' capacity to think creatively and explore their lives and interests. They learn to take risks, become responsible for their progress and enjoy learning. Their commitment to the subject contributes strongly to their achievement and very many of them attend after school activities to extend their work.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good with outstanding features.

- Staff have strong subject knowledge and work very well as a team to share and extend this further. They give unstintingly of their time and energy, set consistently high expectations for students and are always looking for ways to help them succeed.
- The majority of lessons are very well planned to promote a good pace of progress over time. Much teaching in Years 10 and 11 is excellent because of a tight focus on meeting the needs of each student. The students' motivation means detailed discussions can take place with individuals while others apply themselves to their work. Teachers know their students very well indeed, showing great care for them.
- In Years 7 to 9, lessons are good overall but the pace of learning is less consistent. While much outstanding individual guidance is given, some phases of lessons are not sufficiently adapted to meet the varying needs of groups of students. For example in discussions, the less able sometimes require more help to engage with the questions asked and the more able are not always moved on sufficiently quickly.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is good with outstanding features.

- It builds securely on students' prior learning. Materials, techniques and processes are visited in a logical order to enable students to communicate ideas with growing independence.
- Great strength in the curriculum is drawn from expressive, imaginative content within fine art making. There is less evidence of design or craft based approaches. The department has identified the creative use of information and communications technology as underdeveloped and has good plans to address this.

- The interests of students and teachers are reflected in the curriculum. Themes are engaging and where students have the option to choose the subject they do so in large numbers. The department makes good efforts to ensure their needs are met, such as through offering specific areas of study such as 3-Dimensional Studies at GCSE level.
- The short Key Stage 3 course, while stimulating and well planned to provide the foundation for later study, does not always enable the more able students to develop their work fully.
- Curriculum enrichment is exceptional. Visits to galleries and work with artists are a feature of the department. They boost achievement and make an excellent impact on both staff and curriculum development.
- The subject curriculum clearly reflects the school's specialist status for science through links in the schemes of work. Additional activities such as a current project where students are working with an artist, a gallery and undergraduate students on a "natural forms" theme, typify the department's view that art and science have much in common.
- The opportunities for students to spend extra time in the department play an important role in their achievement. Staff work hard to provide extra tuition and the students value this and the excellent working atmosphere in such sessions.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are outstanding.

- The subject leader is energetic and highly committed. He enables staff to work as a team and values the contribution of each. He works very hard to make links with other educational institutions and arts agencies in order to support learning.
- Standards have risen markedly in recent years because of strong subject leadership and there is excellent capacity to go further. The subject enjoys a high profile in the school and is an important part of its work.
- Monitoring and evaluation are accurate, giving the subject leader a clear understanding of areas to improve. Detailed analysis of student performance, alongside staff discussion and work scrutiny, are key factors in subject improvement.
- The monitoring of teaching by the subject leader is accurate and used well to develop the work of individual teachers. However, common themes emerging about teaching and learning are not consistently drawn together to inform development planning or further monitoring.

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

- Individual discussions provide outstanding assessment for learning because they involve students in deciding how to improve. This allows

them to develop individual responses and enables teachers to extend students' ideas.

- The boys make particularly good progress because regular assessment opportunities clearly identify the 'next steps' in learning and show how these will move their work forward.
- Examples of student work are used well by teachers to illustrate different attainment levels and help students understand how to assess their progress. Teachers work very well together to ensure they have a consistent approach to assessment such as when awarding marks.
- The students have good opportunities to write reflectively about their progress. While some of this writing is very useful, some does not reflect the strength of students' ideas when expressed verbally.
- Assessment information is used very well overall to plan teaching. For example in Years 10 and 11, teachers use this information to prepare whole-class activities and individual support. In Years 7 to 9, this is less well developed so that some parts of lessons do not recognise students differing needs.

Inclusion

Inclusion in art and design is outstanding. The subject is closely focused on ensuring that all students receive equal care and attention. Students across the ability range do very well overall. This includes students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities as well as those who find school challenging and for whom the subject provides a way forward. Teaching, especially for older students, is skilful in meeting individual needs. The curriculum is highly effective in motivating all students but its impact is monitored carefully to ensure all are gaining equally and to make adaptations where necessary.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- support more able students in fulfilling their potential by the end of Year 8 when some stop studying the subject
- ensure a consistently brisk pace for learning in Years 7 to 9 by adapting activities throughout lessons to meet students' varying needs.

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