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07 December 2007

Ms Andrea Barnes
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Dear Ms Barnes

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, 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 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 five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- On entry in Year 7 students have mixed ability; some have enjoyed good experiences from primary schools where art and design has been studied in some depth. Standards by the end of year 9 are satisfactory with good aspects in students' understanding of the creative process.
- The proportion of students who choose to continue with the subject in year 10 and 11 is greater than usual. Achievement and standards at GCSE are improving and are now good. In 2007, a high proportion of grades were awarded at A and A*. All students achieved grades at A-G, including three students with learning disabilities and/or difficulties

(LDD). The proportion of students attaining A*-C is in line with the national average.

- At Advanced level there are small numbers of students; progress is satisfactory. Pass rates are consistently high; all students achieved high grades in 2007.
- In the sixth form students are working at an appropriately advanced level. Students are thoughtful in their responses and articulate about their creative ideas. Some use the local environment imaginatively to produce high standards of architectural photography. Students' knowledge of current artists/designers, exhibitions and practice in art and design is variable. For some, this constrains their understanding and creative ambitions.
- The displays of work throughout the department are colourful, vibrant and well presented. Although students make interesting 3D relief structures such as masks and architectural pieces in Year 8 and 9 the majority of more striking work is based on painting and pattern based on a growing understanding, by students at this stage, of the steps in producing work.
- Students are generally well behaved with good attitudes to learning. Teachers have high expectations of students, for their work, attitude and consideration for others. Students, in turn, respond well; they are thoughtful about their own work and aspirations in the subject.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers are experienced and knowledgeable about the subject. A strong feature of lessons is their focus on asking stimulating and interesting questions which make students think. Aims and objectives are explained clearly. Occasionally, despite clear objectives the planned activity does not promote understanding of a key concept as effectively as it might. For example when students do not use the most appropriate media for the activity, or when teacher demonstration is insufficiently used to foster students' understanding.
- One to one support for students is good; students receive good feedback in lessons and know what they need to do to improve their work. They are encouraged by teachers to find their own means of expression, although the range of learning approaches does not include many opportunities for group and team work or peer evaluation. This represents a missed opportunity to help prepare students more fully for the next stage of study.
- Lessons in Key Stage 4 provide real challenges which students enjoy and strive to meet. For example, in Year 10 students worked on large scale self portraits. They found it difficult at first but had a real sense of achievement as they produced sensitive and expressive pieces of work over two lessons.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) has been introduced into teaching and learning and is accessible in most studios.

Teachers and students are developing confidence in the use of ICT as a creative tool, for example in drawing and photography in Year 10 and 11.

- Teaching and learning in the Year 10 design course reflects very relevant content and promotes awareness of creative industries for fashion. Students apply their skills from art and design effectively, researching markets, developing and annotating designs, through to making samples and a garment. External visits to fashion design exhibitions are used effectively each year.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- In Years 7 to 9 the curriculum provides a well planned sequence of experiences. Sketchbooks are used well for both work in class and preparation at home. In lessons, much of the thematic project work starts with 2D drawing approaches then developed or applied to other media at a later stage. While students enjoy and benefit from this experience, there are few opportunities particularly in Year 9 for direct working in a more spontaneous or imaginative way with 3D media, or for example through printmaking.
- Creative project work in Years 10 and 11 encourages individuality. Paintings and drawing show good composition and use of colour. Project themes are open to personal interpretation. The local environment is insufficiently explored as a possible starting point.
- The use of gallery and design based visits, visiting practitioners or artists in residence have not been used enough recently in curriculum planning to foster ideas and knowledge of the creative industries.

Leadership and management of art and design

The Leadership and management are good.

- The subject co-ordinator leads an experienced team of specialist teachers, some of whom have new roles or are newly appointed. They are following whole school learning initiatives conscientiously. Teachers have a good range of practitioner skills in 3D, fine art and textile design. As a newish team, they have yet to identify how they can 'play to their strengths' in planning and redefining curriculum content and approaches.
- The arrangements for school wide quality assurance of teaching and learning are implemented effectively within the school improvement planning cycle. The art and design curriculum review is part of the process; it is evaluative and identifies clearly new curriculum development, examination analysis and priorities for action. The creative team is cohesive and focused on improvement.

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

- The recent availability of electronic information in the studios is an effective tool for teachers to monitor individual progress; it includes information about students' creative strengths. This is being shared and used increasingly by teachers to inform individual planning and progression, for example, between year 9 and 10 and to inform their meetings with parents.
- Students receive constructive informal feedback during lessons and on their sketchbook work. Students in Year 11 say this is very helpful in developing their work. Whilst individual assessment and self evaluation are understood and well established, peer evaluation is at an early stage of development.

Inclusion

- The department's approach to inclusion is good. Students who may be 'at risk' enjoy GCSE art lessons very much as part of their vocational construction and sports programme. Those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have achieved well at GCSE.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extend the range of learning approaches particularly for Years 7 to 9, to provide more opportunities for students to work more directly and spontaneously with 3D media and 2D processes
- at Year 9, to link creative development and learning activity more closely with Year 10
- establish closer links with arts and external practitioners to share ideas and practice, including more first-hand experiences for students through visits to galleries/ artists residencies, and visiting artists and designer-makers, with the aim of providing information about the creative industries and to support the development of students' understanding of creative work.

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

Sandra Tweedie
Additional Inspector