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28 March 2008

Mr K Clark  
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Dear Mr Clark

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: Mathematics and Art and Design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Chris Shaw, Additional Inspector, on 27 and 28 March 2008 to look at work in mathematics and art and design.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of mathematics, the visit had a particular focus on the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics. In the case of art and design the particular focus was on the impact of assessment on individual 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 lessons.

### Mathematics

The overall effectiveness of the subject, mathematics, was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is good and standards are above average.

- Results in national Key Stage 3 tests are above average and have been so for a number of years. Students achieve exceptionally well in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards in GCSE mathematics are regularly above average. The proportion of students gaining the highest A\* and A grades in 2007 was double that expected nationally. Students achieve well in mathematics by Year 11 but progress is slower than in Years 7 to 9.
- Boys of average attainment on entry to the school do not make as fast progress as girls of similar attainment.
- Progress in lessons observed and in students' work is currently no better than satisfactory.
- Attitudes to learning mathematics are generally satisfactory although presentation of written work and communication in mathematics are not always taken seriously enough by staff and students.
- Students preparing for examinations in mathematics are well motivated to secure at least a pass grade.

### Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is satisfactory.

- Much teaching in mathematics is pedestrian and lessons often only succeed because students are generally compliant and well motivated to achieve good test and examination grades.
- Most teachers have good professional relationships with their classes. However, because teachers do not check students' written work thoroughly enough, notebooks are not genuinely helpful records of work covered or necessarily good revision aids.
- Students know the areas of tests in which they have not performed well. They understand their performance in these tests in relation to national standards. However, they are less sure of how their day-to-day work in class and at home relates to their targets.
- Not all mathematics staff plan systematically enough to ensure that students understand each step. Learning outcomes are often too general and planning to assess the learning of each individual in a lesson is not routine.

### Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is satisfactory.

- The current scheme of work guides staff on content and some resources and it points to international links in mathematics. However, the languages specialism has not been used effectively to promote communication in mathematics
- There is little guidance to staff on how learners grow in their understanding of mathematical concepts or on helpful methods and activities in approaching areas of mathematics.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used too rarely to enhance students' understanding of mathematics. In part, this is because the department has data projectors but no interactive white boards.

## Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are satisfactory.

- The subject leader has been recently appointed from within the department, following the resignation of the head of mathematics and the second in charge of the department.
- The turnover in mathematics staffing has been exacerbated by unavoidable staff absence so that currently the department is made up of mainly inexperienced permanent mathematics teachers and some supply staff.
- The monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department previously carried out by the line manager has not been robust enough and has not modelled best practice for the new subject leader. There is not enough informed scrutiny of day-to-day work, including students' written work.
- The inexperienced subject leader is very well supported by the headteacher. The headteacher has a very clear understanding of how the department should develop and has an accurate evaluation of the overall quality of mathematics provision: despite above-average results and good overall achievement, provision lacks creativity and enrichment opportunities.

Subject issue: the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

The recent changes in the management of mathematics have removed barriers to the promotion of greater creativity within the subject. Senior leaders, together with the department, are looking at ways to develop the use of ICT to enhance learning and enjoyment in mathematics. Planning for training in using interactive whiteboards appropriately is under consideration together with financing for the necessary practical and ICT resources. Of necessity, other recent training has focussed on changes in current examination specifications and in making informed choices about future mathematics courses.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in mathematics is satisfactory.

Setting is regularly reviewed to ensure students receive appropriate help in preparing for examinations. Those students who are working at the boundary of GCSE grades C and D are given extra support both within and after school. However, the school recognises that boys of average attainment on entry to the school are not making fast enough progress in mathematics and that further attention to their needs is required. In some lessons, students' individual needs are not well provided for as work is sometimes ill-matched to their previous learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- strengthening the line management of mathematics to support its committed but inexperienced leadership in developing the skills of teachers

- ensuring that ICT and other practical resources are available to the department and that effective training is pursued to ensure regular and appropriate use in lessons
- reviewing the scheme of work to include guidance for teachers on how best to promote students' understanding of areas of mathematics.

## Art and Design

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 enter the school with variable skills, knowledge and understanding in art and design. Whilst a good proportion of students bring useful knowledge and experience, many have weak observation and drawing skills and below average visual vocabulary, such as the ability to use texture, line and shading. They make good progress in Years 7 to 9 because teaching is thorough as well as exciting.
- By the end of Year 9, students' ability to research and develop personal responses to a wide variety of stimuli including different arts, crafts and cultures is good. The range of skills, including drawing from observation, memory and imagination, and the depth of visual vocabulary that they use are also good. Their ability to assess and improve their work is satisfactory.
- Students taking an examination in the subject develop a good range of skills, knowledge and understanding. Their imaginative paintings, prints and sculptures show the impact of contemporary artists and craftworkers as well as different historical and cultural influences.
- Individual progress is sometimes constrained by students' limited speaking and listening skills but teachers work hard to improve these. By the time students take the GCSE examination, many write expressively about what they have learned and the way their work has developed. Together with their use of ICT, their improved communication skills make an important contribution to their success.
- Standards in the GCSE examinations have varied but have in general been average or above. In the double-award applied GCSE in 2007, for example, standards were well above average, with a high number of students gaining grade A or A\*. In contrast, the small ceramics group did less well, with no A grades. This was due to a late decision to switch from non-examination to examination, taken on the basis of the enthusiasm of the students and the extra benefit it would bring them; all passed. Current standards are above average and the achievement of all students is good.
- Students' personal development in the subject is good. They thoroughly enjoy art lessons and cooperate well with each other, contributing to a relaxed but purposeful working atmosphere.

## Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Lessons are characterised by secure subject knowledge. Teachers use resources well to share their knowledge, and generate interest and excitement. In a very effective lesson, students learned the mechanics of several types of animation and linked this with their understanding of movement through their study of traditional Indian dance. The teacher's understanding of the subject and amazing demonstrations generated excitement and interest in the students who made exceptional progress.
- A strength of teaching is the focus on students' learning. They learn how to explore and develop their own ideas; use ICT for research, presentation, and image making; use questions to evaluate their work, and analyse and criticise others' work.
- The use of success criteria in lessons coupled with clear objectives enables lower ability students to achieve well. The more able students are challenged effectively, making them eager to learn more. Individual students are well supported because teachers make careful notes of their achievements and progress.
- Teachers have created a stimulating but safe learning environment by promoting students' good standards of behaviour, cooperation and respect. Health and safety instructions are clear and followed by all.
- Assessment is rigorous and generally good but marking, whilst helpful, gives insufficient information about progress made or standards reached. The use of self-assessment in the GCSE classes is clearly helping students become more independent learners. In Years 7 to 9 this process is at an earlier stage and less effective.

## Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- A very well planned curriculum enables students to build their skills, knowledge and understanding. Nevertheless, it is constantly under review to see what innovations and new courses might inspire and support students further.
- Students enjoy a rich experience of art, craft and design inside and outside the classroom in creative workshops and through research, often with first hand experience and primary source material. They have opportunities to respond to the work of local artists and visiting dance groups, and participate in visits to local and national galleries and museums, and trips to the beach and around the school grounds.
- In addition to visual literacy, students improve their skills in listening, speaking and writing. The development of literacy skills is a continuing objective of the art department, although some input from the English department would strengthen this further. There have been 'language days' and some initiatives to use modern foreign languages but the impact of specialist status on art and design is at an early stage.
- The curriculum involves links with other subjects such as history and English. One interesting example is a stimulating project involving the study of

Shakespearean characters, producing huge figures drawn in lines of writing in the students' own words.

- Contemporary art and a wide range of cultural and historical aspects of art and craft are studied, such as Hindu hand decoration (Mendhi), Aboriginal art, and 'land art' through journeys. Students were inspired by a project using the school field and blindfolds to accentuate their sensory experience of smell, sound and movement.
- Individual students are encouraged and supported to produce personal responses to stimuli and set exercises, particularly in the GCSE groups. The sketchbooks and project sheets of older students show a sophisticated approach to developing work. Research, sketches, photography, experimentation, descriptive writing and writing about thought processes are all encouraged.
- The curriculum is inclusive but there is good awareness of the national issue about developing the interest and involvement of boys in order to improve achievement. Gifted students are offered additional workshops and visits to heighten the level of challenge.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- The arts within the school benefit from a very imaginative and committed leader whose knowledge and professional expertise are outstanding.
- The overriding focus is on providing youngsters with stimulating, creative experiences along with effective 'tools for learning'.
- Teachers are expert practitioners in their own fields and are continually extending and renewing their knowledge and skills to improve the range of choices on offer. The department also responds quickly to fresh ideas and initiatives, such as the need for a vocational element or the new National Curriculum.
- The art teachers cultivate very good relationships with parents that help encourage students to do their best. A recent demanding homework project brought an enthusiastic response from nearly all Year 9 students.
- The school's provision for art, craft and design is continually improving through self-evaluation, which reflects strengths and areas for improvement. Recent developments in assessment, for example, are beginning to have an impact on students' attitudes and achievement.
- The school provides adequate monitoring of teaching and learning which helps improve students' experiences. However the use of expertise from outside the expressive arts faculty is more limited and aspects such as self-assessment could benefit from a more consistent approach with students' other subjects.
- There are good links with local schools and the department makes a good contribution to the local community through projects, workshops and exhibitions.

The impact of assessment on the progress and creativity of learners

This is good.

- Teachers assess students continually and use this information to support learners through discussion, marking, end of project assessment and annual reporting. Teachers work closely together to ensure consistency of assessment.
- Records of students' achievement, progress and effort are used effectively to adjust lesson content, match pace to students' needs and group students appropriately.
- Assessment effectively promotes students' creativity; teachers continually urge students to develop a personal approach. The use of success criteria is embedded in most lessons with the good use of models and examples including the teacher's own work. Teachers sometimes express 'what we are learning to-day' and 'what I am looking for', so that students can gain an understanding of the progress they are making.
- In Years 7 to 9, marking is usually encouraging and helpful but lacks a clear link to learning objectives and National Curriculum attainment levels, so that students are unsure about what actual standard they have reached. This aspect is much better on the GCSE courses because students use a list of assessment objectives, so that they are able to measure their personal progress against the examination criteria.
- Students are given challenging targets based upon past performance and continuing assessment. On the GCSE course a 'traffic light' self-assessment system is used by teachers and students together to indicate progress towards targets. This is new this year but appears to be having a positive impact on attitudes and progress.
- Data from examinations results are studied to provide information for planning the curriculum and teaching and learning, using lessons learned from successes and under-performance. The department is given considerable autonomy in this respect by the senior leaders. This judgement is not based upon examination success alone but also on creative outcomes and the impact on the enjoyment and interest of the students.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- There is a very small proportion of students from black or minority ethnic groups or students with English as an additional language in the school. However, the department ensures that all students are helped to understand aspects of different religions and cultures.
- Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are catered for effectively and make good progress in art and design.
- Boys do less well than girls although not significantly less than boys nationally. The art department is working hard to improve boys' performance through a range of measures. In particular, the self-assessment system and individual support, including parental help, appear to be having a positive effect.
- The department is rigorous in its pursuit of students' individual achievement at GCSE level. Parents' cooperation with teachers is good.
- The students' speaking, listening and writing skills were weak in the lessons observed in Key Stage 3, particularly in the lower ability groups. The department is fully committed to improving these with a range of opportunities to write and discuss. ICT is used imaginatively and broadens students' knowledge and skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- refining the assessment processes to involve the younger students more individually so that they develop a greater understanding of their standard and progress and take more responsibility for their own learning
- continuing to develop the measures to improve the learning and achievement of boys.

We hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop mathematics and art and design in the school.

As explained in our 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

Sheila Nolan  
Additional Inspector