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Ms J Farr
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Dear Ms Farr,

Ofsted survey inspection programme: Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 and 27 February 2008 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 included a focus on the quality of assessment in art and design 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, observations of lessons and part of an in-service session for staff.

Art and design

The overall effectiveness of art and design is judged to be satisfactory but with some inadequacies.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards in art and design is satisfactory.

- Overall, students make satisfactory progress during Years 7 to 9. Standards are in line with the expectations of the National Curriculum but their breadth of skills, knowledge and understanding is narrow. Their control of graphic media, use of colour and 2D composition is good. Their understanding of 3D concepts and use of digital imagery is underdeveloped.

- An average proportion of girls take GCSE. Their performance has improved over the past two years with above average A-C and A*-A grades attained in 2007. A small proportion of boys have taken the GCSE and their results have been below national averages. However, the current Year 11 work contains some good quality imagery by girls and boys that builds on the strengths of work identified in Years 7 to 9.
- Whilst students' research is adequate it is unusual that students have little experience or understanding of sketchbooks or journals and how they can be continuously used to explore the visual elements, experiment with art media or investigate artists' work as an aid to review, revisit and refine their individual ideas or approaches. Students' fluency with drawing is an area for development across all years; it is used too infrequently as an aid to thinking, analysis or interpretation.
- Students' personal development in the subject is satisfactory. They follow teachers' guidance, work carefully and discuss their own work and that of other students positively. Those who choose GCSE are committed and conscientious in lessons. However, there is insufficient diversity between students' work to say that their confidence in using the subject as an opportunity to express personal feelings and insights is fully realised. Independence and initiative are applied late if at all.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design is satisfactory overall.

- Displays are used effectively within the art building and to a lesser extent public areas of the school, to make the expectations of students visible. Whilst resources are well prepared and organised for lessons by teachers there is insufficient focus on managing systems that promote students' independence and responsibility. Guide sheets provide useful back-up but tend to give answers rather than provoke curiosity.
- Teachers use different students' work appropriately to illustrate levels of attainment or examination objectives. This is most effective when complemented by advice about how to evaluate their own work or that of others. Some guidance given to students is focused on negativity at the expense of identifying and nurturing signs of creativity. However, a good set of criteria was used in one lesson observed that helped students interrogate the work of other artists for different purposes.
- Lesson planning identifies clearly students with particular learning difficulties and disabilities, and those with individual gifts and talents. Assessment information is used to structure intervention in lessons. However, differentiation remains by outcome. Different starting points for different groups are insufficiently used to accelerate students' progress and promote originality. The current school focus on distinguishing learning objectives from outcomes provides a good opportunity to address this.
- The most enthusiastic teaching clearly involves an innovative dimension that the teacher is keen to make work. Whilst this is an inconsistent feature of teaching it is a characteristic that students spot, and value. However, in some lessons teacher talk takes up too much of

the lesson and too little use is made of the skills and experiences of students to lead discussions, demonstrate or make decisions.

Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is inadequate.

- The current subject curriculum contains some projects where the subject matter is clearly compatible with the concepts and skills taught. For example, the multicultural themes suit the emphasis on colour and pattern, and focus on designing and blending. However, similar themes and approaches are used across all years leading to decreasing challenge or surprise. Where unfamiliar approaches are introduced, for example the card sculptures created at GCSE, students respond well.
- The department has started to read the responses of students in order to re-shape the course. For example in Year 9 a 'graffiti' project is a more popular option with boys than the topic it replaced. However, there are few opportunities for students to reflect on personal issues or feelings for example about individual identity. There is more to do before it is possible to say that the curriculum meets the needs and interests of different groups of students.
- A good feature of provision is the joint art and design with English visit to the Birmingham City Gallery which is an entitlement for all students at the end of Year 7. However, there is insufficient building on this experience and progression of critical skills through a GCSE gallery visit, or through out of school assignments or by work with living artists in school. The high quality of work achieved by students able to participate in the 'Theatrequest' mask making project demonstrates the value of extending the school curriculum into different contexts.
- Progression is a weakness of the subject curriculum. The prior knowledge, understanding and skills of students when they join the school in Year 7 are insufficiently used. Equally, the relevance of the subject and opportunities to pursue related activities after leaving the school at the end of Year 11 are not made sufficiently clear to students. The students interviewed valued the opportunities in Design and technology to work with a shoe designer because it challenged their skills and informed their thinking about working in the creative industries. There are well established links with the performing arts.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are inadequate.

- The school has developed a systematic approach to subject self-evaluation that informs, and is informed by, whole school priorities. However, this is insufficiently used within the subject to show how the needs of individuals or whole school aims are addressed. For example, the school aim to 'create a culture of learning and achievement in which study, enquiry, innovation and aspiration are highly valued' is ripe for evidence about how the subject contributes. The recent improvement in GCSE results is a consequence of effective self-review

but subject self-evaluation generally is insufficiently enriched by an outward-looking perspective of what might be possible.

- Effective action has been taken to address some of the issues raised in the last subject inspection in 2001, particularly the need to involve students in assessment. Nevertheless, other issues such as the over emphasis on teacher guidance, depth of students' critical analysis and the expressive qualities of students' achievements, remain areas for further improvement. The quality of marking, an area of inconsistency across the school issue identified in 2006, is also too variable between different teachers.
- The challenges and opportunities provided through line management of the Arts is good. The subject makes a positive contribution to the Expressive Arts course and programme of performances. The Arts Council 'Artsmark Gold Award' and the 'Young People's Arts Awards' are examples of cross-arts initiatives the school succeeds with. Students who underachieve are identified and improvement strategies agreed through the line management structure. Revision to the Year 9 course is an example of how the performance of boys is being improved but the department is also aware of potential that is so far unrealised to improve learning and outcomes through work in digital and more physically challenging scale and media for example. There could also be more use of the intervention strategies used in other subjects whilst students are on the course to shift grade borderlines.

Subject issue: The quality of assessment and its impact on students' progress and creativity

This is satisfactory.

- The impact of assessment on students' progress is satisfactory. Teacher and student self-assessments provide an adequate focus on the match between grade criteria and their work. Within lessons there are opportunities provided for students to assess the work of other students and artists. These different strategies each have merits but students do not always recognise how they link together in order to stimulate their progress, for example how evaluating the work of an artist might change the direction and impact of their own work.
- Work selected for display in the studios and gallery provides an implicit message about work that is highly valued. In one studio this is made more explicit by quotes from famous artists. However, more emphasis could be given to process. There are also missed opportunities to emphasise the features of creativity and celebrate the diversity of students' ideas, observations and feelings or the innovative work of contemporary artists, craftworkers and designers.

Inclusion

- Inclusion is a satisfactory feature of lessons. Teachers focus their attention on students whose known learning difficulties and/or disabilities or their approach to the lesson indicates that particular support is required. Occasionally reactions to lack of concentration by a small but significant minority of younger boys which focuses on their

behaviour more often than their work, overshadows the positive contribution of the majority.

- The gallery visit for all Year 7 students is an inclusive feature of the curriculum. The department are also beginning to widen the range of topics to appeal to different pupils but there is more still to do. Students perceive success in the subject reflects a particular style of work indicating that the breadth of study currently constrains their understanding about the creative diversity this subject encompasses.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- use the visionary leadership within the college and exemplary subject support within the locality to focus subject leadership on raising the creative expectations of all students from the start
- develop students' initiative, independence and decision making by providing a wider range of experiences for students to build on and select from across the subject curriculum, within and between lessons
- increase students' understanding of the relevance of the subject by developing more first hand experience including reflection, expression and insights into contemporary artists, craftworkers and designers.

I hope these observations are useful in your aim to develop the quality and maximise the impact of art and design at Bishop Perowne C of E College.

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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector