

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



12 March 2008

Mr N Barrow
Headteacher
Shirley High School
Shirley Church Road
Croydon
Surrey
CR0 5EF

Dear Mr Barrow

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10 and 11 March 2008 to look at work in art and design.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of art and design, the visit had a particular focus 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 yourself, the deputy head and the two joint heads of art; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; discussions with art students, and observation of five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in art and design are satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with average skills, knowledge and understanding in art providing an adequate foundation on which the school is able to build. Hard work and commitment on the part of teachers and students, coupled with satisfactory teaching, enable students to reach average standards at the end of Year 9. Achievement is satisfactory.
- By end of Key Stage 3 students are able to research and make imaginative compositions and constructions based on interpretations of

other artists, different cultural influences or from direct observation. However, their experience of moral, social, cultural, political, and religious themes are rare and this has been identified by the school as an area for development. In some instances students follow personal creative routes but most stick to variations on a theme set by the teacher.

- In Years 10 and 11 students' skills and understanding increase as students select more personal areas for research, promoting further commitment and enthusiasm. This enables students to make satisfactory progress and reach average standards in the GCSE examination.
- By end of Key Stage 4 students control a range of graphic and construction materials confidently and are able to make suitable choices to express their ideas. The most creative students are inventive and imaginative. However, students' experiments are sometimes constrained by a conservative approach to curriculum planning and by the lack of clear steps in learning.
- Teachers ensure that all students are fully engaged; in 2007 all students passed the exam and there was no significant underachievement by any group. Boys achieved slightly better than expected compared with the national average.
- Students do not sufficiently develop the vocabulary and literacy skills that are needed to analyse qualities in their own and others' work. Opportunities to discuss and write are limited and the teachers' marking is not helpful.
- Students enjoy art lessons and are keen to do well. They develop very good relationships with the teachers and feel safe and well supported. Older students feel it is important to set an example to the younger ones, who appreciate seeing more advanced work as a spur to their own efforts.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in art and design are satisfactory.

- Teachers work extremely hard on the students' behalf: planning, preparing, encouraging and giving up their time to provide extra opportunities outside the lesson. They create a very positive atmosphere and ethos with this caring approach. Students respond well to this and art is a popular subject.
- Discipline and respect are important features of learning and this helps create the safe and orderly environment in which students and teachers work.
- The use of assessment is the weakest aspect of teaching because it is not integral to lesson planning. Teachers assess individual students continually. This is helpful and in the best lessons is stimulating and challenging. However without a clear link to learning outcomes in the lesson, students are not easily able to judge their own progress and make improvements unless the teacher has recently spoken to them.
- Marking is not used sufficiently well to inform and challenge the students. Though teachers have developed a self-assessment sheet this is not easily linked to National Curriculum levels. Students are

unclear what their assessments mean or how they might move on, and there is insufficient discussion about this or indication in the marking.

- Students are shown how books, magazines and the Internet can provide source material for their projects but there are too few opportunities to explore art, craft and design first hand. Observational skills and recording through the use of sketchbooks are well developed but students are not given clear enough guidance about how to judge, analyse and criticise their own or others' work.
- Teachers use online and other computer resources to introduce topics and provide source material but information and communications technology (ICT) has little impact on the work of students beyond research into art and artists.
- Higher attaining students are clearly identified and encouraged.
- Students are given clear guidance about courses and careers in the subject. A good proportion of GCSE students are interested in taking their studies further whilst others feel that the qualification is a valuable contribution to their overall education and prospects for the future. Useful links with a local school helps students make choices about further steps in art and design.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- Coverage of the National Curriculum in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory with sound opportunities to learn by drawing from still life. Students' build adequately on previous learning through planned projects that systematically develop their visual language and practical skills.
- In Years 8 and 9 students are organised into art groups on the basis of their attainment in ICT. Teachers adapt their approach to broadly meet the needs of these different groups.
- The GCSE course provides an emphasis on a more individual approach and a deeper understanding of artistic endeavour. Students are encouraged to pursue their own interests whilst their skills and understanding are developed through a set pattern of project work but with encouragement to take a more individual approach.
- There is a satisfactory range of materials and the department encourages the creative use of simple 3D media, for example in mask making and sculpture. There is inadequate computer equipment or expertise to develop students' skills in exploring and manipulating digital imagery.
- There are satisfactory opportunities to do things in the way that artists, craft workers and designers might do them. Pupils are given some insight into the creative processes that artists go through when they study say, the Surrealists, the Impressionists or make carnival masks. However, these exercises rarely stimulate the students to produce an emotional or philosophical response.
- Teachers introduce key vocabulary as appropriate but there are too few structured opportunities to use this either in discussion or writing. Opportunities are missed to develop the students' written English.

- Students do not experience the work of contemporary local artists, craft workers and designers which limits their understanding and outlook.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The senior leadership group have provided adequate support and guidance that has enabled the school to raise standards and achievement in the subject from a previously very low point. The capacity for further improvement is now satisfactory.
- Along with some additional support from the local authority and from examination boards, the dedication and commitment of the joint subject leaders have also been instrumental in the increase in standards.
- The department has begun to make use of assessment data by applying the school's system and this is most effective when used with the department's own notes and knowledge about students, to help plan schemes of work. The department keeps appropriate records and marks and assesses students' work regularly. However subject leaders have had ineffective guidance and support on how they may involve the students in assessing their own work and understanding the steps they need to improve it. This is inhibiting progress.
- The departmental records show that self evaluation is not well understood. The joint subject leaders have not been effectively involved in or engaged with the process of self evaluation and improvement. Current development plans, whilst recognising the need to improve examination results still further, do not have sufficient focus on what needs to improve in art and design lessons in order to achieve that.

The impact of assessment on the progress and creativity of learners

This is satisfactory.

- Teachers assess students' work regularly and provide expert help and advice. Verbal comments encourage students to try harder and to improve their knowledge, artistic skills and understanding.
- Teachers share learning objectives with students, though these are not specific enough to enable students to assess their own work and progress during the lesson.
- Students in Key Stage 3 do not develop sufficient independence to enable them to take charge of their own learning and become more creative because teachers do not give them clear enough criteria.
- Students taking examinations in the subject are given long one-to-one academic mentoring sessions that explain the examination marking criteria and show them how to improve. However, this not done until they are well into Year 11 and makes them too reliant on the teacher for most of the course.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory.

- Teachers work hard to ensure that students are engaged and able to make progress. All groups of students including those from ethnic minorities are given equal opportunities and there is no significant difference in progress between the different groups.
- Tracking the progress of students of differing abilities in a cohort, whilst adequate, could be strengthened in order to differentiate support further. For example, talented or gifted artists are identified and encouraged but the assessment and marking of their work could provide additional challenge.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- make teaching more challenging by improving assessment and marking so that students become more fully involved, understanding how they can evaluate and modify their work more independently
- ensure that subject leaders use self-evaluation more effectively to improve provision and its impact on standards and achievement
- broaden the curriculum to include more contemporary and local art, craft and design, relevant issues, and aspects of the whole school curriculum that contribute to students' 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