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Mr D Moloney
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Moloney

Ofsted subject survey: identifying good practice in art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 January 2008 to look at the impact of your work with the local community as a school with specialist status for the visual arts.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included meetings with members of staff, students, an artist, adult learners and teachers from partner schools. I also observed lessons and analysed key documentation relating to community projects.

Features of good practice observed

- The very wide range of community activities enables large numbers of school staff and students, as well as external partners, to benefit from collaborative activity in the visual and performing arts.
- Strong commitment from senior leadership to developing the community dimension through the school's specialist status is reflected in the effective use of resources, appointments of staff in key roles and a flexible approach to the use of staff time to enable them to be involved.
- A plan for what will be achieved which, in the majority of areas, reflects very well the needs of the school alongside those of its external partners

and encompasses an ambitious vision for what “community” means by including local, regional and global links.

- Excellent communication and relationships with partner organisations enabling trust to develop and projects to evolve effectively.
- High quality work with partner institutions leading to improvements in teaching, learning and the curriculum in those settings.
- Projects with local primary schools raise students’ attainment in the visual arts to the benefit of those schools and George Abbot if and when they join. Transition is aided because these primary pupils are more familiar with the school, having met some of the staff and students.
- Good experiences are provided for adult learners alongside a growing familiarity with what goes on at their local secondary school. On the few occasions where adults work alongside young learners, they are able to benefit them by modelling excellent attitudes to learning.
- Artists, including locally based practitioners, gain employment through the school’s work as well as developing their experience of teaching.
- Benefits for George Abbot students include learning more about those who live in other social contexts through engagement with diverse and sometimes distant partner schools. By working outside the school environment, for example showing their work in public, the students learn about the tensions this can involve and by working alongside arts professionals, they gain an insight into the arts as a vocation as well as experiencing examples of high quality practice.
- For teachers at George Abbot their practice is enhanced through the challenge of working in other settings, with staff from partner institutions and with groups coming into school. They welcome the commitment from senior leaders to the community dimension and the encouragement to be experimental and take risks in their teaching.
- The curriculum at George Abbot is enriched by the inclusion of processes or techniques arising from community based projects.
- The school reviews and refines its work regularly. For example good use is made of questionnaires to gather the views of a wide range of stakeholders about the impact of work completed with them.

Areas for development which were shared during the visit

- Links with business partners are underdeveloped as compared to the rich range of connections made with other community groups.
- While there is good take up of courses by adults, relatively few participate in certificated courses or study alongside young learners.
- Evaluating the impact of work in other settings, such as primary schools, does not always pay enough attention to the impact on standards in order to plan the next steps.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the gallery in school. As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector