

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

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



23 June 2008

Mr K Quine  
Headteacher  
Forest School  
Robin Hood Lane  
Winnersh  
Wokingham  
RG41 5NE

Dear Mr Quine

Ofsted survey inspection programme – art and design and geography

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Mike Milton on 16 and 17 June 2008 to look at work in art and design and geography.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of assessment in art and design and its impact on students' progress. In geography the visit assessed how literacy is being used to enhance learning in the subject.

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 eight lessons or part lessons in art and design and the observation of nine lessons in geography.

Art and design

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- From average attainment on entry, students achieve well and reach above average standards by the end of each key stage, although the proportion taking the subject at examination level is average.
- The students make good progress in exploring the properties of the materials and processes available. They work confidently on different scales and when exploring new ways of working. For example they are responding well to the opportunities this year to use information and communication technology (ICT) in GCSE and A-Level photography.
- They complete good quality visual and written analysis of other artists' work and use it well to support their own studies. Sketchbooks are good; their use to record and develop ideas is well established and students use them effectively to try ideas out and experiment.
- The students enjoy and value the visual research underpinning their work. They complete high quality studies from direct observation, making good use of visual elements like tone and colour to record and analyse what they see. While many students communicate emotional content or ideas such as movement effectively, this presents more of a challenge for some in controlling their materials. Nevertheless they develop increasingly ambitious ideas as they get older and some sixth form students' work is very mature and personal in nature.

### Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and have high expectations of students. They are a relatively inexperienced team but have gained effectiveness quickly and enjoy good relationships with students.
- They have good subject knowledge, particularly in fine art disciplines including photography and use this well to support the students.
- Learning is well structured over time. Deadlines are set usefully within projects and closely monitored. This helps students learn to complete work at a measured pace rather than leaving it all to the end.
- Most lessons are engaging and include a good range of activities. The students make good progress during practical or discussion phases and in evaluative writing tasks, although not when these go on too long.
- The majority of lessons meet students' varying needs well. Support for individual students in practical activities is good and staff work hard to enable all, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, to achieve. However, in parts of lessons, notably initial whole-class activities in Key Stage 3, there is sometimes too little variation in content to challenge and support students of differing abilities. This impedes progress and leads to some frustration and inattention on the part of a minority of students.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory.

- The curriculum focuses well on developing students' ownership of their work as they get older so that they can produce individual outcomes. The focus on contemporary approaches to arts practice is good.
- At Key Stage 3, breadth of practical art and design experience is reasonable. For example students encounter three dimensional work, drawing, painting and printmaking. However, they do not experience ICT as a creative medium or enough craft processes and this discourages some from studying the subject further.
- Where students choose to study for examinations they are well served by the curriculum. The predominantly fine-art focus, both in the art and design and photography courses, enables them to address challenging and topical themes which support their personal development well. Students of all abilities enjoy photography, including those with weaker traditional drawing skills who are enabled to make successful images through the medium of the camera.
- Where reference is made to the work of other artists these are thoughtfully chosen. They include appropriate examples of contemporary European practice and male and female artists; however there is too little reference to local practitioners so students are unaware of creative practice in their locality.
- Enrichment of the curriculum has strengths in the visits conducted to museums and galleries. However, there are weaknesses in the lack of recent contact for students with living artists.
- The impact of the school's specialist status for business and enterprise on art and design is satisfactory. Students are encouraged to be enterprising in their work but references to the world of commerce through the subject are inconsistent.

### Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The subject leader is committed to the subject and has a clear vision for its development. She leads her team well and makes good efforts to keep the department abreast of wider developments such as the new National Curriculum requirements for September.
- Through good monitoring, including visiting lessons, scrutiny of work and analysis of assessment data, the subject leader has a largely accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses in the subject.
- There is good capacity to improve, reflected for example in the effective action taken to reverse a drop in GCSE results last year through improving teaching and learning.
- Priorities for subject development relate well to whole-school issues and are mostly articulated clearly in the subject development plan. In a minority of cases success criteria are not precise enough to be measurable.

Subject issue: the quality of assessment and its impact on students' progress and creativity is judged to be good.

- The assessment of students' work is regular and encourages them to develop individual outcomes and to be inventive. Students have a good understanding of how to improve their work.
- Lessons contain regular opportunities for students to assess their progress. Not all find this easy but they are well supported particularly through the individual discussions with teachers which become increasingly detailed as students get older and class numbers smaller.
- Teachers assess students' progress effectively during lessons through questioning and observation. The best questioning is used not only to test but extend students understanding although there are some inconsistencies in how well teachers adopt such approaches.
- Marking is very good. Sketchbooks are used well by students to record work and develop ideas and teachers use them well as a means to guide students and reflect on their progress.
- Students have a good understanding of their targets. Those on examination courses have a particularly good awareness of the criteria by which they will be assessed and teachers refer to these regularly.
- Tracking students' progress is good and underachievement is accurately identified and tackled.
- Assessment information is used well to monitor and evaluate subject effectiveness and identify where improvements are needed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure teaching and learning activities are always well matched to students' differing needs in all phases of lessons
- improve the curriculum by broadening the range of processes included, particularly at Key Stage 3, to ensure more experience of ICT and craft and to better reflect the local area and its creative practice.

## Geography

The overall effectiveness of geography is good.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are both good.

- Key Stage 3 students make good progress and reach standards above national expectations by the end of Year 9.
- GCSE students make outstanding progress and the results have been consistently high for nine years. They make this outstanding progress because teaching is consistently good, there is a systematic and thorough revision programme, they receive high quality feedback on how to improve their work, and there are strong student-teacher relationships.
- At A level, students make progress which is better than in most other subjects. As a result of this good progress, their standards are above national averages.

- Students have positive attitudes to geography although they are not particularly enthusiastic. Many respond well to challenging work and opportunities to use their initiative. For example, the sixth form students carry out investigations competently for their research essays about topics such as the Olympics and Aids.

### Quality of teaching and learning of geography

The quality of teaching is consistently good.

There are a good number of common strengths to lessons:

1. Teachers have very good levels of subject knowledge and so teaching is clear, accurate and related to students' own experiences.
  2. There is a good variety of activities in lessons with a brisk pace of learning.
  3. Lucid learning objectives are shared with the students, and used to review learning at different points during lessons.
  4. Questions are used very effectively to develop and extend students' thinking, and to help them find their own answers to questions.
- There are a limited number of opportunities to actively involve the students in their learning. Students enjoy these challenges and achieve well at them.
  - There are missed opportunities to use the data projectors and laptops to present a variety of visual learning resources to motivate the students.
  - Some aspects of assessment are outstanding especially for GCSE and A Level. The regular marking of students' work makes clear its strengths and points for improvement. Almost all students know their current and target grades or levels and what they need to do to close any gap.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum planning for Key Stage 3 is very well structured and includes the development of students' enquiry skills but it is not sufficiently imaginative and interesting. A new curriculum plan is being implemented from next September and this is more relevant to students' learning needs and interests.
- There is a good fieldwork programme in Years 7, 8 and 11 but little in Years 9 and 10.
- The GCSE course is very well structured and the fieldwork in Henley provides very good opportunities for enquiry and independent learning.
- Students have insufficient opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) as part of their Key Stage 3 and GCSE lessons, including the use of geographical information systems.

- Education for sustainability is a strong theme that underpins much of the work for the full age range.
- The school has business and enterprise specialist status and geography's contribution to the specialism is planned into the curriculum. For example, there are some creative activities as when Key Stage 3 students devise geographical games linked to industrial development in Japan.

### Leadership and management of geography

Leadership and management of geography are good.

- The head of geography took up the post in January 2008 has made some positive improvements in a short period of time.
- Self evaluation and development planning are of a good quality and focuses on further raising pupils' standards and achievement.
- There is a good capacity for further improvement because the geography staff work effectively as a team.

### Subject issue

The extent to which literacy is being used to enhance learning in geography is good.

- The Key Stage 3 scheme of work includes planned opportunities for students to develop their literacy skills. The development of literacy skills is included in lesson planning, and is sometimes part of the lesson's learning objectives.
- There is some good support for writing through the provision of structured guidance to help students develop their skills.
- Teachers provide high quality feedback in their marking.
- There is a focus on the accurate use of key geographical vocabulary during lessons and students complete a good range of types of writing. At GCSE, students have a good range of well structured work and A-level students have a good range of types of writing.
- Pupils are less used to working collaboratively. In a few of the lessons seen, students discussed a question or issue in pairs before reporting back to the class. However, a minority did not do this confidently.

### Inclusion

The provision for inclusion in geography is good overall.

- Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because they are taught in smaller groups.
- They also benefit from the individual support provided by teachers and effective teaching assistants.
- Lower-attaining students are set challenging tasks in many lessons and many answer questions and contribute their ideas to discussions.

- Occasionally, students with learning difficulties are not given sufficient support to make good progress with relatively complex ideas.
- Higher-attaining students face good levels of challenge and, in some lessons, there are special tasks matched to the learning needs of gifted and talented students.
- Different groups of students achieve equally well in geography and many in geography achieve relatively high GCSE grades.

#### Areas for improvement

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- make better use of ICT and geographical information systems to support both teaching and learning
- create more opportunities for students to become more independent learners
- improve provision for fieldwork, especially in Year 9.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art and design and geography 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

Stephen Long  
Her Majesty's Inspector