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Mrs L Asquith
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Dear Mrs Asquith,

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16 and 17 September 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 had a particular focus on the quality of assessment and its impact on pupils' 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 observations of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness was judged satisfactory with good features.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are satisfactory with good features.

- Students have wide ranging ability and experience of art, craft and design when starting at the school. Their observational drawings indicate below average standards on entry which improve through regular practice and guidance during Years 7 and 9.

- Boys and girls enjoy handling a wide range of two-dimensional, three-dimensional and digital media in Years 7 to 9. Good progress and understanding is evident where clear links are made in the curriculum between exploring visual concepts, learning about relevant artists and applying their understanding and skills, for example Year 7 'line' work.
- A lower than average proportion of students take the subject in Years 10 and 11 and GCSE results fluctuate in relation to high national averages. But students do well in relation to their other examinations and a good proportion of boys and girls achieve A*-A grades.
- The standard of printmaking is good across all years. Striking designs are created and techniques controlled skilfully. Pattern and print work appeals to the students who value opportunities to make for a purpose and contributes to their success on vocationally related courses.
- Work inspired by self-image is particularly effective. Students revisit the topic regularly and relate their own ideas well to those of other artists. The best work integrates the use of digital technology and is expressive of personal feelings but not all students exploit these skills and qualities in their later, examination work.
- Students develop positive attitudes and supportive relationships through the subject. The participation of boys and girls in discussion is good. They handle responsibility well when expected to evaluate the work of other students or their teachers but many are reluctant to take the initiative and demonstrate their independence. Staff have identified the need to increase students' extra-curricular involvement.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Teachers use their subject knowledge effectively to inspire confidence in the students, for example by managing demonstrations well. When exploring different art media students are not afraid to take risks due to the reassuring climate in the classroom. Students value accidental effects and develop useful sketchbook skills as a result.
- Classrooms are managed effectively to promote interest in subject matter and care in use of resources. Display is used effectively to inform students about how to achieve high grades. Whilst some students work with visiting artists, learning outside the classroom is underdeveloped, for example by using the locality more as a resource.
- The lessons observed were good. Students were involved and engaged including those with learning difficulties or physical disabilities. Work in portfolios and stored digitally indicates inconsistent quality but includes some high level teaching; for example sculptures inspired by Gabo that are supported by excellent guidance.
- Students are taught effectively how to revisit ideas, skills and approaches used previously. Sketchbooks are valued by teachers and students as resources and reminders. The displays of large laminated copies of sketchbook pages displayed around the school add importance to the process of creating art. Nevertheless creativity could be more explicit as a lesson objective.

- Teachers manage class discussion well and use their knowledge of individual students thoughtfully to support their needs. The management of homework is a good example of how teachers have adapted a whole school priority to the specific needs of the subject.

Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory with good features.

- The department has developed imaginative bridging projects in the past to build the Key Stage 3 curriculum on students' experiences at primary school. Whilst not currently used to inform baseline assessment, students' first project in Year 7 provides a good curriculum model to modify in line with the new secondary curriculum.
- The breadth of the curriculum is a strength of provision. Students are able to work in a wide range of media and learn about different artists, craftworkers and designers.
- The range of topics encountered by students is dominated by personal identity and human form. Some strong work related to this theme shows the value of revisitation. Nevertheless, given the lower than average numbers opting for the subject the appeal of other topics is an area for further consideration.
- Secondary sources are extensive but first hand experiences are minimal. However, staff and students have valued past visits to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and Tate Liverpool and the department plan to increase the use of primary sources.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) is integrated effectively in the art and design curriculum. Teachers, students and their parents have access to an increasing range of curriculum resources out of school through ICT.
- Options at Key Stage 4 include opportunities to pursue a vocational course. Close collaboration with the local college has also enabled the school to prepare for the introduction of the Creative and Media Diploma in 2009. Additional courses linked to the Chesterfield Learning Community aim to meet students' individual needs, interests and aspirations.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are satisfactory with some examples of good practice.

- The subject makes a visible, immediate and positive contribution to the school environment. Imaginative plans for the development of the school and grounds include opportunities to extend the impact.
- The department is respected by senior leaders as an example of good practice in several areas of provision, identified through internal monitoring and evaluation. Subject self-evaluation is at an early stage.

- The views of student lesson observers are gathered systematically. This initiative has not yet informed improvement planning in the subject but nevertheless shows that the views of students are valued.
- The subject leader is well respected within school and has established a productive working relationship with the local college.
- Liaison with other subject specialists in different schools is mostly focused on exam related issues. National initiatives, for example the 'Big Draw', Artsmark scheme and Arts Award have further potential to promote collaboration within the school and with the wider community.
- Judicious use is made of available resources, for example the support roles of the technician and vocational course administrator. The involvement of artists extends the expertise of teaching strategically.
- The department shows good capacity for further improvement based on the long term track record and effective response to previous inspection findings.

Subject issue; The quality of assessment and its impact on students' progress and creativity This is satisfactory.

- Students receive regular feedback through discussion with teachers, self-evaluation, peer assessment and through teachers' marking.
- Lesson and assessment objectives do not make creativity explicit, of particular relevance to the new secondary curriculum and diploma.
- Teachers show their understanding of creativity through demonstrations and through good questioning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increase the proportion of boys and girls who participate and succeed in examination courses and who support extra-curricular initiatives
- develop subject self-evaluation, informed by the views of students' already started, and through collaboration with external specialists
- make necessary improvements to provision in Years 7 to 9 in order to fulfil the new opportunities of the revised subject curriculum.

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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector