

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr G Lewis
Headteacher
Kings Langley School
Love Lane
Kings Langley
Hertfordshire
WD4 9HN

Dear Mr Lewis

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 14 and 15 October 2008 to evaluate your 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 impact of the new secondary subject curriculum that challenges you to develop students who 'think and act like artists, craftworkers and designers'.

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 students, staff and governors, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of assembly and observations of seven lessons or part lessons.

Art and design

The overall effectiveness was judged satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Students have wide ranging ability and experience of art, craft and design when starting at the school. They make satisfactory progress in a range of 2 and 3 dimensional media to attain standards in art and

design examinations similar to those achieved nationally. Their use of digital media is underdeveloped.

- In Years 7 to 9 students use their sketchbooks to record an adequate range of evidence. Students who continue into Years 10 and 11 make significant progress in using their sketchbooks to explore art media, collect observations, research themes, review and modify ideas which has a positive impact on the depth and diversity of their work.
- In Years 7 to 9 the quality of pupils' printmaking is good. They are able to abstract design effectively, manipulate tools skilfully and revisit their work to build effective patterns in a combination of colours. Their prints are an example of good standards that could still be taken further with applications to different surfaces and purposes.
- In Years 10 to 11 students develop the confidence to work on a more ambitious scale, particularly in 2 dimensional media. They are able to combine perceptive observation with lively imagination to create well crafted and meaningful images. Students have satisfactory knowledge of other artists but their awareness of contemporary practice, designers and craftmakers in particular, is limited.
- Whilst the proportion of students opting to take a BTEC or GCSE in art and design is above average, a small proportion of students continue to AS and A-level. Nevertheless, their striking work makes a significant impact in the school due to their increased confidence to experiment.
- Students enjoy their art and design lessons in all years. Many students show commitment through work completed independently. Leadership responsibilities for the most able or experienced are underdeveloped. However, students with different abilities are equally attentive when teachers demonstrate and sensitive when discussing others' work.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are satisfactory.

The impact of teaching on learning is satisfactory overall. The best lessons are very well taught but not all students experience consistently high quality, evident in the variable standards achieved. However, teaching observed contained the following good features:

- Stimulating artists were chosen to inspire the students. For example, a year 10 group were captivated by techniques used by Max Ernst
- Confident demonstration by the teacher enabled the students to gain an insight into teachers' expertise and enjoyment as an artist
- Displays of past students' work were used to promote curiosity and make it clear to the students how to achieve higher grades
- Resources were well prepared and studios organised systematically to maximise use of time and the support of the technician
- Activities in the studios linked directly to the first hand experiences enjoyed outside school, such as a visit to the Henry Moore Foundation
- Marking directly attached to work was blunt but constructive and valued by the students because it identified clearly how to improve.

Students' learning was less effective when teaching displayed the following features:

- Objectives were expressed more as activities, making it harder for teachers and students to measure their success at the end of lessons
- Supportive intentions nevertheless led to over-direction resulting in similar outcomes for different students
- Assessment grades were insufficiently focused on specific skills or pieces of work, making little difference to subsequent performance
- Students were given too many answers without being challenged to think or research for themselves
- Teachers were anticipating the updating of their art studios as a consequence of the school's recent Specialist Arts College status. Sound plans are in place to develop facilities with improved information and communication technology (ICT) provision, space for sixth formers to work independently and a gallery area for use as a teaching resource.

Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory.

- Students are able to use two and three dimensional media regularly. The integration of digital media as a creative tool is at an early stage. However, existing courses are successful in providing students with an insight into art, craft and design. Teachers have a range of expertise to deliver breadth and depth in the curriculum.
- A recent innovation in Year 8 provides excellent opportunities to work collaboratively across subjects. Whilst it is too early to evaluate the impact, three projects are already planned, promoting exploration of different cultures across the arts. The arts award is offered to students providing another example of coherence across the arts.
- A range of options are available to examination level including BTEC, GCSE and the new Creative and Media Diploma. However, there remains a strong 'Fine Art' bias within lessons post-14. Links with creative industries are developing to improve opportunities for students to experience 'live' projects.
- The most successful projects respond to students' interests or introduce students to subject matter that engages different abilities. For example, the 'Pop Art' project used to transform a favourite celebrity or everyday artefact, and the 'Buildings' project which can be interpreted on a range of levels.
- First hand experiences have a positive impact on the depth and diversity of students' achievements. For example, bringing a Matisse painting 'to life' in Year 7 or a visit to the Imperial War Museum in Year 11 which inspires students and informs their response to the theme of 'Conflict'.
- Whilst the curriculum increasingly promotes larger, more ambitious work and enables the students to interpret themes more individually as they progress through the school, in Years 7 to 9 there is less evidence of personalisation. A contributory factor is insufficient knowledge of students' experiences in the Foundation Stage, Key Stages 1 and 2.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are satisfactory.

- Senior staff are committed to the subject and its pivotal role in the success of the school's recent specialist status as an arts college. Your assembly which used images of contemporary art to promote students' thinking about values, is indicative of the aim to accelerate students' achievements and ambitions through specialism.
- Governors are knowledgeable about the subject and supportive of staff. Their insights are not yet used to full advantage; governors have valuable experience of the creative industries, evident in the observation that students should be sufficiently passionate and prepared to 'stand up and fight for their work'.
- Subject self-evaluation is used effectively to inform improvement priorities. The subject leader is able to accurately evaluate the most effective projects. The challenge remaining is to use this information together with more systematic use of students' views, to improve consistency of teaching and learning.
- There are strong and supportive working relationships within the department. Inspection evidence indicates that the subject leader is a respected practitioner able to lead other teachers by example. New strategies to collaborate with other departments and schools provide good opportunities to put this experience into practice.
- Awareness of innovation nationally is satisfactory. Cross arts initiatives, such as the Artsmark scheme and Arts Award are used within the school. However, more could be made of significant challenges such as the impact of contemporary practice, or work of the 'Campaign for Drawing' to build on the successful but safe foundations established.
- Resources are managed efficiently including the support of the technician. There are imaginative plans to increase the involvement of artists and maximise the use of facilities. Whilst the school site presents a challenge there are attractive pockets of display, including outside, that lifts the environment and promotes the subject positively.

Subject issue: the impact of provision on students' ability to 'think and act like artists'

This is satisfactory.

- The new secondary curriculum is at an early stage of implementation. In particular, the assessment scheme requires updating in order to promote students' success in reaching or exceeding the new levels.
- Some lessons are highly effective in taking students into the mindset of artists. For example, a recording of Henry Moore's daughter talking about the sculptor's life and work engaged the students.
- Working routines enable the students to learn how to act like artists. For example, the students maintained and stored their individual palettes of acrylic paints by using routines introduced by the teacher.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- update the curriculum in relation to the new art and design programme of study at Key Stage 3, vocational provision at Key Stage 4 and enrichment opportunities associated with specialist status
- develop consistently good or better teaching by using collaboration with other subjects and educational settings to inform self-evaluation and by analysing students' responses more systematically
- capitalise on the experience, support and creativity of staff and governors in order to widen the impact of the subject on students' achievements, including their creativity and personal development.

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