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07 October 2008

Mr N Poole
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Dear Mr Poole

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 06 October 2008 to look at the impact of your initiative using an exhibition of past students' art and design work as a stimulus for teaching and learning.

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 discussions with members of staff and students, observation of lessons, scrutiny of work displayed and analysis of key documentation provided for the visit.

Features of good practice observed

- Unusually, the school arranges the major exhibition of previous students' work to coincide with the start of new courses in September. The focus, whilst different from the many schools that celebrate the end of summer term with their GCSE exhibition, is clearly on learning from experience.
- The timing of the exhibition sets high expectations of the students at a critical point in students' target setting. They respond by aiming to surpass the achievements of the previous year. In 2008 GCSE results exceeded the previous year: 90% achieving A*-C, 32% achieving A*-A.
- Students are able to relate examination criteria directly to first hand evidence. Examples of a very wide range of sketchbooks, coursework and examination work alongside assessments provides students with clear guidance about how to attain high grades while striving for originality.

- Collaborative work between students in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 in response to the exhibition is highly effective in building co-operative and supportive relationships between students. The vast majority develop responsibility, including students with little experience of leadership.
- Students in Key Stage 3 develop a clear understanding about what taking an art and design GCSE entails. They are able to analyse examination work and ask questions of students currently experiencing GCSE, informally in small group settings. Those who opt are committed.
- Students in Key Stage 4, through their mentoring role, consolidate their own understanding about how to achieve well, through their guidance to younger students. Many increase their confidence due to increased self-knowledge about how far they have progressed since Key Stage 3.
- The transformation of the art studios into art gallery takes the students expecting routine by surprise. Teachers successfully create a 'gallery' ethos through professional publicity and formal events. The students respond respectfully to an informal environment that depends on trust.
- Teachers develop new insights into students' personal development and subject knowledge through the opportunity to observe the students working in their groups. They use intervention effectively, enabling students to work independently if their productivity justifies it.
- Teachers in the department use the exhibition effectively as a tool for monitoring and evaluation. Modifications to the curriculum and teaching evolve from reviewing the visible impact of different approaches taken. For example, the use of conceptual art and sophisticated responses by students noted.
- The gallery initiative is integral to the curriculum. Links with approaches and topics used before and after, ensure that students' experience has lasting value. For example, the Year 7 and Year 11 focus on natural forms linked to their current scheme of work inspired by Barbara Hepworth.
- Students' work is given similar status to the work of famous artists. High quality prints of students' work are displayed alongside prints of artists' work. Sales of professionally printed greeting cards illustrating images of students' work provide a real experience of being a commercial artist.
- Making the exhibition a venue to visit at the weekend provides opportunities for families to experience the value of visiting a gallery together. The local community enjoy a very accessible and positive impression of students' achievements through an informal occasion.

Areas for development which were shared during the visit

- enable students to apply and deepen the critical skills developed through the school exhibition initiative to a gallery visit outside school
- promote students' mentoring skills by structuring other opportunities to share and review work, including feedback from students now in college
- record and share evidence of students' responses when working collaboratively, to inform the overall picture of their personal development
- develop the community gallery space in school as a stimulus for different groups, subjects and arts disciplines across the school and community.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop initiatives in and through art and design at the 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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector