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Dear Mr Labedz

**Ofsted survey inspection programme: information communication technology (ICT) and art and design**

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Stephen Long HMI on 02-03 March 2009 which looked at work in ICT and art and design. As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus on assessment for ICT. For art and design the focus was on the extent to which students learn to think and act as artists, craftspeople and designers, working creatively and intelligently' and 'develop an appreciation of art, craft and design and its role in the creative and cultural industries that enrich their lives'.

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 discussions with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and lesson observations.

**Information and communication technology**

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

**Achievement and standards in ICT**

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly in line with national averages.

- Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.
- Standards reached at the end of Key Stage 4 from 2006 to 2008 were significantly below average.

- Changes in the leadership and management of the ICT department as well as improvements made to the curriculum and that of the quality of teaching and learning are enabling students to now make satisfactory progress. Consequently, standards are rising in both key stages.
- Despite the significant increase in the last couple of years of students attaining GCSE grades A* to C, too few attain higher levels.
- Standards at Key Stage 3 having been low in previous years are now broadly in line with age related expectations and improving rapidly.
- Students develop particularly good skills of how to present, exchange and share information; however, their ability to review, modify and evaluate their work is less well developed.
- Most students are learning to become independent users of ICT for example, for project work, homework and in the use of ICT as a tool to support their learning in other subjects. This is enhanced by the school's learning platform which is embedded within its website, and enables students to access schoolwork from home and complete work which they send to their teachers by email.
- There are pockets of good practice in the use of ICT in other subjects. This is helping to raise standards particularly in mathematics, science, music, media and business studies.
- Some of the more vulnerable students talk about feeling a greater sense of pride in their work in other subjects when they are able to use ICT as opposed to feeling undermined by their low literacy skills.
- Students demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe; however, they are not sufficiently involved in the school's evaluation of its policy about internet safety.
- ICT contributes satisfactorily to the school's inclusion policy. There is some good additional provision beyond the ICT department which makes effective use of ICT to help students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to overcome their barriers to learning. A good example is the use of laptops with specialist software that enable students who are visually impaired to engage fully with the curriculum.

## Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good practice.

- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and are effective in creating a purposeful learning environment.
- Students generally find activities challenging and enjoyable except when content is too repetitive.
- Strategies to ensure that all students are able to work as successfully as each other are not always fully utilised. This includes missed opportunities of using assessment and structured talk activities to focus students on the skills they are developing and the progress they are making.
- Where assessment strategies are used well in lessons this leads to good progress. A good example was seen in Year 10 with a lesson in which students were using ICT to support their GCSE work in media studies. Students were encouraged to use a checklist on the school's

- learning platform, to monitor their progress against expectations. This helped them to reflect on the quality of their work.
- However, further down the school such strategies are less well embedded and although students are aware they have targets and know where they can access additional guidance, they are not directed often enough to make use of this information to identify for themselves how they could improve their work. This at times reduces the progress made by students of different abilities, particularly the less able.
- In some lessons, teaching and learning are more focused on the activities than the skills and capabilities the students need to develop. This limits students' understanding of how well they are progressing in their learning. There are also insufficient strategies to enable some of the less able students to learn how to talk about their work confidently using the correct terminology.
- At times teachers are too directive, and do too much of the talking instead of helping students to recall for themselves what they already know and what they should do next.
- The specialist status for business and enterprise has led to a greater focus on the use of ICT in the world of work and in real life situations.

## Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Students all receive their statutory entitlement for ICT, with some aspects of the curriculum being covered in other subjects.
- The school has worked hard to improve the quality of the ICT curriculum, and this is leading to students becoming more engaged in their learning. However, the programme of work does not provide sufficient guidance about levels or progression in skills. This makes it difficult for staff to ensure that work is always well planned to meet the needs of different groups of learners.
- Aspects of the curriculum which are covered particularly well include finding things out, working creatively and using ICT to solve problems.
- ICT is used innovatively in the personal development days for students. The days promote greater cross-curricular use of ICT with students using ICT as a tool to undertake research and to help them develop skills and concepts. A good example is when students used ICT to solve a murder mystery. They used ICT to analyse data and information in a way that enabled them to work well as a team, and develop their analytical and thinking skills.
- Although students are grateful for the work of the school and the opportunities afforded to them, they would welcome more access to ICT in other lessons and a broader range of hardware and software.
- You are currently revising the Key Stage 4 curriculum to make it more appealing to girls. This includes planning more opportunities for students to be creative.
- There is a satisfactory range of resources, but the extent to which ICT is used in all subjects and in a range of locations is constrained by limited access to ICT and problems with wireless technology.

Leadership and management of ICT

The leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory.

- The head of department is making a good contribution to improving the school's work in ICT from a very low starting point. This is helping to raise standards as well as the profile of ICT in the school.
- The ICT department is now working effectively as a team and are consulting more widely with other departments. However the head of department has not developed his role to help to integrate ICT across the curriculum. Consequently, there is not a sufficiently clear view in the department of how well students are progressing on those areas of the ICT programme of work covered by other subjects.
- The department is supported well by senior members of staff, especially in using data to identify and challenge underperformance.
- However, management documentation for ICT although detailed, does not focus sharply enough on progress and standards or the intended outcomes for different groups of learners. Furthermore, success criteria are not always sufficiently measurable.
- You undertake regular audits of staff training needs and provide high quality training. However, there continues to be training needs for staff within the ICT department.
- You are currently developing a sustainability plan, as the current predicted cost of upgrading and replacing hardware is proving prohibitive.
- The school has a very good website that is valued by students, their parents and other departments. The learning platform provides access to a wide range of additional resources and guidance for staff and students. For some subjects such as media studies, mathematics, geography and English, the content of the site has become an integral part of courses.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment in ICT is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment in ICT on entry to Year 7 is assessed and this enables staff to set work which builds effectively on students' previous knowledge and skills.
- The ICT department is beginning to set more challenging targets and is involving students more in the setting and reviewing of their targets.
- The students' progress is satisfactorily tracked and monitored. However, the analysis of data does not compare the performance of different groups of learners. Furthermore, assessment systems do not ensure the department has a clear view of the provision and progress for all students for all the strands within the ICT programme of work.
- Students value the helpful feedback they receive from their teachers following a piece of work, but the use of assessment strategies during lessons is not sufficiently rigorous.
- The school is developing strategies to involve students more in the assessment of their work, such as providing them with useful check

lists. However, this has yet to become firmly embedded within daily lessons and some of the older students, particularly those who are lower attaining are still too dependent on being told what to do to improve their work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards particularly at Key Stage 4
- ensuring teaching is consistently good and takes full account of the needs of different groups of learners
- improving the quality of management documentation to ensure there is a greater focus on progress, standards and that success criteria are measurable
- ensuring the department has a clear view of the provision and progress for all students for all the strands within the ICT programme of work.

## Art and design

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

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in art and design are good.

- From average starting points students make good progress in both key stages, reaching above average standards by the end of Years 9 and 11. The proportion of GCSE students achieving A*-C grades is well above the national average. The proportion of boys gaining these grades is markedly higher than their peers nationally because they sustain the development of their work well over time. However the proportion of students gaining the higher A and A* grades is average.
- Students enjoy the subject. The majority behave very well in lessons, working thoughtfully and sustaining their concentration.
- The best progress is made by students in learning to control materials and processes. For example students develop good skills in using drawing for different purposes and in using different types of paint.
- The strong base of skills is used well by students to develop individual ideas, notably at GCSE level where they value the chance as one said to 'make our own work'. Nevertheless, some students are not clear enough about what they are trying to achieve. This makes it difficult for them to refine their work and is the factor preventing some from gaining higher grades.

## Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- The subject staff are enthusiastic and have good subject knowledge. Although there are a number of new teachers this year, they work well as a team and the students feel their lessons are well prepared.
- Relationships with students are positive so that lessons have a good atmosphere and this adds to students' enjoyment of the subject.

- Activities are structured and paced effectively so as to sustain students' focus. Resources are well chosen, for example in a Year 8 lesson students learned about the narrative qualities in Hogarth's work in preparation for making their own graphic novels.
- Students' achievement is tracked carefully over time and they are kept well informed of the progress they are making. Underachievement is usually identified accurately and suitable steps taken to remedy it.
- While strategies, such as discussion, are used to help students think about their work and assess their progress such activities do not always challenge or support them, particularly the more able, to think independently about how to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is popular with students during their first three years of study. They respond well to the themes covered and to the wide range of observational and imaginative starting points. As a result they opt for the subject in good numbers at GCSE level.
- The students experience a satisfactory range of materials and techniques. However there is an emphasis on fine art-based approaches and too few opportunities to explore craft-based projects or to use digital technology as an expressive medium.
- Key Stage 3 projects have a strong structure and students value the security this offers. However it does not progressively encourage them to take decisions for themselves about how their work develops and sows the seeds of a weakness at GCSE where students are required to pursue more individual direction in their work and justify what they do.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The subject leader joined the school at the start of the academic year and has established herself well. The subject has a history of strength and she is showing determination in developing it further.
- A good range of monitoring activity, including lesson observation and data analysis, gives the subject leader a good awareness of what needs to be done next. The priorities identified in the subject development plan provide a good agenda for the future with most planned carefully to have a measurable impact on students.
- Resources and staff development are managed well in relation to the needs of the subject. Links are starting to be forged with local organisations such as galleries so as to enrich students' experiences although the school knows there is further to go to develop these.

Subject issue: the extent to which students 'learn to think and act as artists, craftspeople and designers, working creatively and intelligently' and 'develop an appreciation of art, craft and design, and its role in the creative and cultural industries that enrich their lives' is judged to be satisfactory.

- The students develop a good understanding that the work of other creative practitioners is an important source of inspiration to them because their projects regularly make reference to the work of others.
- Teachers introduce the work of creative practitioners with confidence especially in relation to techniques used and the influences upon the artists' work seen. Sometimes however the artist's underlying reasons for making the work are not probed deeply enough. This means students do not always understand why decisions for example about colour or subject matter have been made. In turn this hinders their own reflection about what they are doing and why.
- Good use is made of gallery collections on-line to support students' learning. GCSE students value the visits they make to galleries but younger ones do not have such opportunities. Currently students do not experience creative practitioners at work directly so they do not see aspects of the creative process such as risk taking in action or learn how people like artists make a living.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- adapting the curriculum and teaching so students are challenged from an early stage to think independently about developing their work
- broadening the curriculum through giving more emphasis to craft-based work and to the use of digital technology as a creative medium
- giving students direct experience of creative practitioners at work so they learn about creative processes and livelihoods at first hand.

As explained in the 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


Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector