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Mr J Morris  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Morris

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 4 and 5 November 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 and staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, and observations of six lessons or part lessons.

Art and design

The overall effectiveness was judged good.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are good.

- In Years 7 to 9 the students make good progress in a range of 2 and 3 dimensional media to attain standards in art and design similar to those achieved nationally. For example, work inspired by the artist

Salvador Dali and that inspired by the 'Green Man' show that by Year 9 students are able to express imagination and refine technical skills.

- Students with wide ranging ability, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, develop the confidence to use art media boldly. Sketchbook work contains striking imagery and mark-making, often where students use their skills to capture and interpret observations. For example, drawings of natural form using four media.
- In art and design students make good progress in developing literacy skills, which tests indicate are very low overall on entry. The impact of teachers who illustrate the meaning of technical terms, is positive in extending the vocabulary used by students. Whilst presenting writing in art challenges many students, they are impressive in discussion.
- In Years 10 to 11 students continue to make good progress, achieving high examination grades in their GCSE and BTEC Certificate and Diploma courses. Lively, colourful and interesting work in 2 and 3 dimensional media builds on students' skills developed in Years 7 to 9. However, their creative use of digital media remains underdeveloped.
- Boys and girls respond enthusiastically to projects that draw on their observations of art, craft and design in the world outside school, having a practical as well as an aesthetic function; for example, their designs and constructions of fantasy shoes and boots. Students sustain vision and effort to combine creative ideas with skilled craftsmanship.
- Students' sketchbooks indicate that their knowledge and understanding about the work of different artists, craftworkers and designers underpins the development of more individual work in Years 10 and 11. Whilst students depend on teachers' initial direction, they interpret a range of stimuli, ranging from Pieter Claesz to the Boyle family.
- Boys and girls with different abilities look forward to their art and design lessons and appreciate the inclusive teaching and support. Challenging concepts made easy to understand by effective teachers have a positive impact on students' self-esteem and desire to achieve. Students use the subject well to communicate their views and feelings.
- The students interviewed valued their art and design lessons and considered patience, determination, organisation and listening, skills they developed and applied in other subjects. One student expressed the view that the subject enabled him to learn more generally, through observation. Continuity onto art related courses after leaving is good.

## Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are outstanding.

- Stimulating and unpredictable teaching has a very positive impact on students' learning. The quantity and quality of students' achievements, their positive views about art and design lessons and the records of internal monitoring and evaluation, indicate that the very high quality of teaching and support observed during the visit is sustained.
- Lessons are thoughtfully planned, using knowledge of the students and analysis of their previous responses, to prepare interesting and engaging activities. Teachers not only share their objectives in easy to

- understand language at the start of lessons, but very effectively reveal how the programme of activities has been designed to achieve them.
- Teachers and the learning support assistant create a welcoming but challenging environment for learning. A brisk, business-like lesson pace is punctuated with well managed whole group discussion and constructive one-to-ones which build on what individual students can do. Adults communicate in a way that balances passion for the subject with credibility as an adult in tune with the world outside school.
  - Teaching and support staff contribute to a positive ethos for learning by using praise to students when given the opportunity. The learning support assistant also openly expresses her enthusiasm for teachers' efforts and students mirror this. In several lessons observed teachers were rewarded by compliments from the students about the lesson. One student shared her ambition to become an art and design teacher.
  - Visual communication is exploited effectively through inspiring displays which make high expectations explicit, short and sharp but informative demonstrations, and expertly prepared powerpoint presentations which model the selection and composition of imagery and text expected of the students. In one lesson the teacher used personal artefacts poignantly to prepare the students for a topic about war art and artists.
  - Knowledge of individual students is well matched to teaching strategies used. For example, in one lesson whilst most students explored ideas through drawings in their sketchbooks, two boys were encouraged to use their spatial skills to model directly in card. In another, a student expressed his understanding of 'ephemeral art' through an exquisitely crafted maquette using strips of vegetable pinned together spirally.

### Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- Students are able to develop their visual and tactile skills through regular use of two and three dimensional media on a variety of scales. Whilst textiles is an area being developed, the interface between two and three dimensions is nevertheless encouraged through relief work and units of work which explore surface. However, digital media is underdeveloped as a creative tool to develop still or moving imagery.
- A wide range of artists, craftworkers and designers are introduced to students. Some projects are particularly successful in promoting students' critical skills by juxtaposing different artists to compare and contrast who share a coherent element to their work. For example, reference to Andy Goldsworthy, Karl Blossfeldt and Antonio Gaudi illustrated the use of different media to interpret organic forms.
- Students encounter the work of artists, craftworkers and designers through secondary sources, through examples of teachers' own work and occasionally through a visiting artist or gallery visit. Work inspired by a graphic designer and visit to an exhibition of sculpture in the city show that the curriculum builds effectively around these events. Nevertheless, not enough students experience these currently.

- At Key Stage 3 a recently introduced initiative has linked learning in art and design with humanities and the whole school focus on improving students' literacy. Whilst it is too early to evaluate the impact it has exposed the need for a Key Stage overview which identifies clearly the progression required in art and design in different curriculum contexts.
- At Key Stage 4 a range of courses exist to match students to examinations of varying length and difficulty. Vocationally related courses are growing in popularity with the students. Teachers select interesting subject matter that strengthens their relevance to students and the world of work. For example, students responded well to an advertising project observed, themed 'Protect me from what I want'.

### Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The subject is very well led by example. The subject leader is an inspiration to other teachers and support staff, including other art and design colleagues. The subject successfully retains a distinctive identity in the school but contributes effectively to the development of the arts faculty of which it is part, specialist technology college targets and whole school priorities, for example to raise students' literacy.
- Vision for the subject is expressed in few, but carefully chosen words that are directly related to the experiences enjoyed by students. For example, the department defines its ethos as 'powerful in awakening students' self-belief and self-esteem, promoting learning participation and achievement'. Inspection evidence concurs with this statement.
- Subject staff are continuously reflective and self-critical, driven by their ambitions for the students. Whilst this is not necessarily captured in a self-evaluation document, well informed priorities and challenging targets drive the work of the teaching team and improvement plans.
- An effective balance is achieved between a coherent curriculum, consistently high quality teaching and opportunities for individual staff to make a personal stake in success through their own innovation.
- The subject is well placed to make a significant contribution to national initiatives. Networking does take place but the high priority given to supporting the students at Hamilton by developing exemplary teaching, makes analysing and articulating success to others a low priority, both internally and externally. Enrichment opportunities could be missed.
- Evaluation by senior staff is accurate. Senior staff do not underestimate the contribution of the art and design team to the whole school. Additional roles and responsibilities given to subject staff are a measure of the influence that staff are encouraged to exert at middle management level. Support at senior level for the development of the subject is evident, for example the development of a new textile 'pod'.

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 following the introduction in September, but schemes of work have been successfully modified to identify opportunities to develop students' personal, learning and thinking skills in art and design.
- Project themes in Key Stage 4 are particularly effective in taking students into the mindset of artists, craftworkers and designers who respond to a commercial brief. The direct involvement of the creative industries in setting and evaluating projects is underdeveloped.
- Creativity is a strength of teachers' lesson objectives and students' achievements. The concept is understood. Nevertheless, there are not enough opportunities in the current assessment scheme to focus on creativity as a quality achieved or to target for improvement.
- Working routines enable the students to learn how to act like artists, craftworkers and designers. Teacher demonstrations and examples play an important part in modelling approaches to research, resource organisation and review used by professionals. However, the links between working practices used by the teachers and students, and practising artists is not always made explicit to the students.

Examples of good practice, which we discussed, included:

- the quality, pace and impact of teaching and support staff
- the confidence of boys and girls in using a range of media
- the relevance of projects to art, craft and design in the wider world.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop students' use of digital media
- increase students' first hand experience of art and artists
- define students' essential subject knowledge and skills in Years 7 to 9.

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

