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Mr Williamson
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Dear Mr Williamson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – physical education and art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 and 15 January 2009 to look at work in physical education (PE) with Ian Middleton HMI who looked at work in art and design.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a focus on assessing the PE contribution to the outcomes of Every Child Matters, particularly 'being healthy'. The focus in art and design was the impact of provision on students' ability to 'think and act like artists'

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 schools but the individual schools 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 in PE and art and design included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of documentation and lesson observations. We also evaluated the quality of department facilities and resources and sampled the school's work with partner primary schools.

PE

The overall effectiveness of physical education was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is outstanding overall and students reach very high standards.

- From broadly average starting points students reach very high standards by the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Many more than usual reach Level 6 and gain an A* or A. Standards in A level PE are also high, but achievement is good rather than outstanding. Lesson

observations confirm high standards and the swift progress of most students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

- The school is renowned for its sporting prowess. For example the school reached national finals in six different activities. Students gain county and international recognition in a range of sports, some of them non-traditional, for example biathlon, rock climbing, water polo and cycling. Students' progress against the four core strands of PE is excellent.
- Students' personal development through PE is outstanding. Their behaviour and attitudes are exemplary and they relish the leadership opportunities afforded them. Large numbers participate in enrichment activities and they embody fair-minded and considerate young people.
- Students' self-esteem and confidence is boosted regularly through celebratory events and the awarding of sports colours and merits.

Quality of teaching and learning of PE

Good teaching with outstanding features promotes very effective learning.

- Staff use their expertise and enthusiasm to build meaningful relationships with students, and to challenge and 'stretch' them. Lessons are well planned, focused and enjoyable. Varied learning approaches engage and deepen students' PE knowledge, skills and understanding. An emphasis on building students' confidence, critical thinking and team working skills accelerates their progress.
- Underpinning students' success is excellent staff support and guidance. Positive feedback, good use of information and communication technology and corrective intervention are commonplace. Some staff help students to 'risk take' and be creative, which enables them to go beyond what they think they are capable of. Newly qualified staff in the department have settled in well and receive high quality mentoring and guidance.
- Recording, reporting and assessment practice is coherent and comprehensive. Parents receive useful feedback about their children's progress, attitude and effort. Regular target setting, appraisal, peer and self-assessment leave students in no doubt about how well they are progressing and how they can improve further.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Core PE provision is broad and balanced, exposing students to all six National Curriculum activity areas during their time in the school. Students can opt for GCSE PE and A level PE. In addition they can gain leadership, coaching and officiating awards. Students also visit an outdoor adventure centre. There is a sixth form PE afternoon, but it is set against other lessons, so not all students can take advantage of it.
- The curriculum is matched to students needs following evaluation of base line tests of their core PE skills on entry to the school. An innovative 'Cyber coach' scheme has been introduced, which aids coordination and agility, and which students can use independently.

- Students profit from an extensive and inclusive extra-curricular programme, which offers many and varied opportunities. The school sports coordinator has made good PE links with other schools and I observed a group of Year 10 sports leaders working very well with primary school pupils. School-to-club links are strong and provide students with many progression routes. Several students train for PE related careers each year.
- Units of work were recently extended to promote better continuity and progression in students' learning, while aspects of provision personify creativity including rhythmic gymnastics and synchronised swimming. A good range of PE facilities supports high quality curriculum delivery.
- The department does not offer alternate vocational qualification routes such as BTEC Sport. Opportunities are missed to mentor their numerous elite performers through schemes like the JAE programme and to fast track the most able students into early GCSE and A level study.

Leadership and management of PE

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- PE enjoys a very high profile in the school and beyond. The shrewd and devoted head of department, ably supported by the head of girls' PE, has strategically moulded a team of high calibre PE professionals with complementary skills, who share a common ethos and work together exceptionally well. Student outcomes are superb because of skilful management that focuses on promoting excellence, enjoyment and a 'passion' for sport. They are supported well by you.
- The department runs like clockwork, with clear systems and structures that guide staff and students very well. Planning is sound and schemes of work have been adapted in line with the requirements of the new Key Stage 3 PE curriculum. Rigorous appraisal and quality assurance ensure there is an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses. Scrutiny of the PE self-evaluation and action plans show key leaders' sound grasp of PE pedagogy. While regular training keeps staff up to date with current thinking in the subject.
- Resources are deployed well and facilities managed effectively to assure value for money. There is good capacity to improve further.

Subject issue - PE contribution to the outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM), particularly 'being healthy'

- PE makes a good contribution to ECM outcomes and students epitomise 'healthy bodies and healthy minds'. Students 'love' PE, participate regularly and achieve highly. There are also specific clubs aimed at those needing to improve their fitness levels. Students immerse themselves in PE by playing in school teams and acting as sports leaders and organisers. Some gain sport related work experience.
- Students know how to act responsibly and stay safe during PE and develop a number of key skills such as team working, leadership and the ability to analyse and improve their own and others' performance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- exploring alternate qualification routes such as vocational options
- enabling more sixth form students to benefit from enrichment activities
- mentoring elite performers and fast tracking the most able.

Art and design

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good overall. Standards achieved in the GCSE are outstanding.

- Students are above average overall on entry to the school, but baseline assessment in the subject indicates that students have wide ranging ability and experience of art, craft and design. Boys and girls achieve good standards in a range of 2 and 3 dimensional media. Pattern and design are strengths. Their use of digital media is underdeveloped.
- In Years 7 to 9 students use their sketchbooks to record and present a wide range of ideas, observations and research. Sketchbooks also show that students are able to evaluate their work thoughtfully in order to refine their skills. In some projects students use their critical skills analytically to compare, contrast and interpret other artists' work.
- An above average proportion of boys and girls continue into Years 10 and 11. Students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make good progress. Outstanding GCSE results are attained, all students achieving the higher A*-C grades in 2008.
- Across a range of media including ceramics, textiles, graphics and fine art, students develop a good level of technical skill, express imaginative ideas and abstract design particularly well. Lively and colourful work evolves from well researched themes and knowledge of contemporary artists, craftworkers and designers. Digital media remains underused.
- AS and A-level grades indicate that the relatively small proportion of students who continue with art and design make satisfactory progress. However, students advance the personalisation of their work, often tackling unfamiliar techniques and making more independent connections between their own work and that of other artists, craftworkers and designers.
- Students enjoy their art and design lessons in all years. The vast majority show a high level of commitment by concentrating in lessons and by preparing or following up lessons. Boys and girls are attentive, observant, contribute thoughtfully when questioned and sensitively when discussing the work of other students. Behaviour is excellent.
- Students respect teachers' knowledge of the subject and proven track record. However, not all students develop the confidence to pursue a personal line of enquiry, initiate questions, ideas or experiments, or make connections to the work of others independently at this level. These methods prove challenging for students continuing post-16.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good. Some is outstanding.

- The teaching team provides students with a varied but consistently good experience of different two and three-dimensional media. Students in all key stages benefit from more than one teacher during their course which enables staff to work to the specialist strengths in which they were trained.
- Teachers build good relationships with their students. Boys and girls look forward to the well prepared lessons that stimulate their curiosity, provide plenty of opportunities for practical activity, contain clear guidance about skill development but which also reveal teachers' sense of humour and continuing passion for their subject.
- In most lessons the teachers' preparation models the expectations made of the students. For example, collections of materials, organisation and maintenance of equipment, creatively presented theme boards, all direct students to working practices they follow well. Some students admitted to feeling exposed by lessons that challenged their routines, for example in a lesson introducing experimental approaches to drawing, but which nevertheless promoted creativity.
- Teachers use demonstration effectively to make high expectations explicit. The involvement of students in demonstration is underdeveloped. Nevertheless, their work in progress is shared effectively and timed to enable students to act on what they have learned. Students are taught how to maintain equipment, care for materials, and use technical terms, all observed in a ceramics lesson.
- Whilst learning through first hand experience by visiting a gallery or working with a practising artist, is underdeveloped, teachers use information and computer technology (ICT) effectively to make links between art created in school and the outside world. For example, explaining the meaning of anthropomorphism, students were shown a diverse range of examples used in commercial art at different times.
- Key to the liveliness of the teaching is the way in which the teaching team are all involved in initial teacher education (ITE). Although not formally documented in monitoring records, teachers continually question their own methods and effectiveness. Projects are frequently refreshed and their interest, for example in unfamiliar artists, palpable.
- Assessments are used frequently to monitor students' progress and focus support in lessons. The best planning shows how different activities and strategies are used to meet individual needs, but differentiation by task is an area of inconsistency. Support staff are well deployed in lessons and assist students effectively.

Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- References to the work of contemporary artists, craftworkers and designers throughout the department are a significant strength of the curriculum, promoting creative use of materials and meaningful work. However, whilst gallery visits and artists in residence do take place

their strategic use, for example to deepen, question or consolidate students' understanding of particular concepts, could be strengthened.

- Specialist teachers, each with a secure understanding of progression in their area of expertise, provide good opportunities for students to develop and refine their skills within each material area. However, the level of challenge, for example in using critical skills to analyse and interpret different artists' work, varies within and between courses.
- Exemplary units of work skilfully juxtapose contrasting examples of work by different artists, craftworkers and designers. For example, traditional Arabic calligraphy contrasted with the contemporary paintings of Sadiq Toma, or stylisation of a 'Rupert' annual contrasted with 'Sonic' designed for computer games a generation later.
- The curriculum model developed by the department, whereby students encounter different aspects of art, craft and design in all key stages, is effective in providing a good quality and range of experiences that interests different learners. Opportunities to specialise do exist although decisions about the choice of media areas to pursue at GCSE are not always based on students' preferences or performance. They nevertheless do well at GCSE but in the sixth form sometimes start with basic skills in their preferred media.
- Good links exist with local colleges enabling students to progress onto further and higher education courses with good knowledge of the opportunities and expectations involved in specialisation. Several students pursue art and design related careers each year. Whilst there are limited links with the creative industries, an enterprise initiative, a glass workshop with gifted and talented pupils, and introduction of the Creative and Media Diploma later in the year, are good developments.
- Project themes are successful in tapping into, as well as developing, students' interests. Some projects also explore students' feelings and beliefs, for example related to the Christian ethos of the school and the purpose and meaning represented by imagery or artefacts inspired by different religions worldwide. However, students' later projects do not always show how students' reflective qualities build on the success of such projects in Key Stage 3 or link to their whole school journals.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- Effective teaching is the clear and consistent departmental mission, achieved through a collegiate approach in which all staff make a distinctive contribution. However, self-evaluation is also well-informed by involvement in the subject beyond school. For example, work with tutors and trainees through sustained partnerships with Manchester Metropolitan University also add to the enrichment and challenge.
- Assessment and progress tracking is coherent and effective across the department. Whole school systems are adapted well to serve learners' needs in the subject. For example, the department's baseline assessment, designed to evaluate students' subject knowledge and skills following transfer from an unusually large number of schools.
- The subject leader has successfully built a team of staff with complementary skills. Expectations of all who teach and learn in the

department are high, evident in the choice and presence of display throughout the department. There are pockets of public exhibition, for example in the local hospital, showcases of 3D work around school, an exhibition in the Millennium Chapel, but parents would welcome more.

- Written documentation does not generally do justice to the strong sense of purpose and principles pervading the department. Whilst this does not detract from the effectiveness of the teaching it does result in a basic form of improvement planning which does not communicate clearly enough strategies to improve underdeveloped areas such as ICT. Subject self-evaluation is however a developing strength.
- The management of groups and individuals within the department contributes to the good achievement. The strategy to enable all students to work with more than one teacher during all courses is well judged. The students also value the department's culture of welcoming them to discuss and continue work between lessons and after school.

Subject issue - The impact of provision on students' ability to 'think and act like artists'

This is good.

- Changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum are at an early stage of implementation. The strong use of contemporary examples makes the department well placed to respond to the new challenges. However, the assessment scheme requires updating in order to track and 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 recoding of an interview with the artist Stephen Wiltshire captivated the students, following an introduction about his work produced when he was a similar age to the students themselves.
- Working routines are particularly successful in enabling students to learn how to 'think and act like artists' when they are given opportunities to recognise the artist in the teacher, for example through sharing their own work. Entrepreneurial projects are also effective in teaching students how the subject contributes to their future economic well being or that of others in the community.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increase opportunities and guidance to promote more first hand experience of the work of artists, craftworkers and designers
- ensure that improvement planning communicates clearly to senior staff and governors the strategies to build on the department's success
- challenge students to develop and apply their independence, initiative, confidence and creativity through and in art, craft and design.

I hope these observations are useful as you work to develop PE and art and design in the school. A copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

John Young
Her Majesty's Inspector