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Mr T Brookes
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Dear Mr Brookes

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 9 and 10 February 2009 to look at 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, working creatively and intelligently'.

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 staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observations of five lessons.

Art and design

The overall effectiveness was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are good overall.

- Students have below average attainment on entry and gain a wide range of skills and experience of art, craft and design by the end of Year 9. For example, Year 9 students show good handling of colour, spatial awareness and balance in their large scale studies of pomegranates and in their Pop art project.

- Students make good progress early on. Year 7 students had produced some effective 3D portraits using newspaper collage as a background with low relief portraits in card based on the tonal range from Picasso's Guernica. In one lesson Year 7 students were asked challenging questions on the qualities of colour based on their own work and that of the Fauves. Their answers were thoughtful and showed good understanding.
- The subject is popular and increasing numbers of students opt to study art and design in Years 10 and 11. In 2009 there were over a 100 GCSE entries and the majority achieved well. Examination results for GCSE have improved steadily to just above the high national average with many students achieving grades higher than those predicted.
- Year 11 students are well motivated and apply themselves with enthusiasm, contributing to good standards and progress in lessons. Students' artwork is vibrant, varies in scale and is carefully executed and presented. They enjoy the increased opportunities for personal expression. For example, a successful and witty graffiti project using lettering on unusual everyday objects such as a steering wheel and in another project showing their own interpretations of Art Nouveau illustration.
- Achievement and standards in the sixth form are satisfactory, with some evidence of underachievement in high grades. Sixth form students taking AS level are able to discuss their ideas confidently; their finished mixed media work is good. However, the depth of research and quality of first hand visual content in sketchbooks is underdeveloped for both AS and A level students. Students benefit from the designer in residence who works with them. There are relatively small numbers taking courses at advanced level.
- Students are generally well motivated, they enjoy a good rapport with their teachers who are approachable and give guidance outside timetabled lessons and workshops held after school.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good overall.

- The features of good and better lessons were good structure, clarity of purpose, attentive students, good concentration and good progress. Teachers were skilful in their use of questioning which encouraged students to think for themselves and also evaluate their work and that of their peers. In weaker lessons students worked too slowly or an activity did not sustain interest sufficiently well for the whole lesson.
- In the studios, teachers use displays effectively to inspire and prompt students to analyse process and strive for good standards of work, although clearer indications of grades awarded would be a useful addition.
- Students benefit from well informed individual guidance from their teachers, all of whom are specialists. Assessment is accurate and is clearly focussed on identifying any potential underachievement or indications of significantly good progress, particularly at Key Stage 4. In the sixth form the approach is less systematic but is nevertheless

successful in ensuring that interventions are timely and promote higher standards.

- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and those who are gifted and talented are supported unobtrusively in lessons often through different approaches to teaching and learning.

Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory with some good aspects.

- The new curriculum has been reviewed in Year 7 and offers a wider range of experience to encourage creativity, understanding and skills in 2D and 3D media. Good aspects include some innovative projects which teachers have designed, for example, using 3D 'birds eye' view of a town and imagery and colour inspired by the work of the architect and painter Hundertwasser. There are school curriculum plans for 2009 to work in a more thematic way at Key Stage 3 and this is influencing curriculum discussions in the creative subjects for the coming year.
- The range of media and processes available includes ceramics, 3D, printmaking and mixed media with some use of digital media. However, the use of digital media is restricted by the resources available at present.
- Enrichment opportunities contribute positively to the curriculum. Sixth formers attend life drawing lessons at the school. Visits to Cartwright Hall, nearby colleges of art and design and photography galleries have been made by GCSE and sixth form students. Plans are being made to extend these activities for students in Key Stage 3. After school workshops help students to explore their work in more depth.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are satisfactory.

- The subject review and analysis of performance are detailed, accurate and realistic. The performance of the sixth form is identified correctly as an area for improvement and senior managers are working closely with the subject leader and staff to support improvement.
- The subject leader and art team work with enthusiasm and drive to support their students' creative development within the creative arts faculty.
- Available resources are organised and managed carefully. The accommodation is old but provides a good range of spaces located closely together. Technician support is good.
- The capacity for further improvement is good. The school leadership is clearly focussed on improvement, their overview and analysis of the subject performance is thorough.

Subject issue: The impact of the new secondary curriculum on students ability to think and act like artists

This is satisfactory.

- The new curriculum scheme of work for Year 7 onwards offers a wide range of experience of 2 and 3 dimensional media.
- Teachers show their understanding of creativity through their subject expertise, good questioning to groups and individuals which encourages students to think for themselves.
- The use of external visits to increase students' awareness of the creative and cultural industries is focussed mainly on Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extend contact with sixth form art networks and practising artists, craftworkers and designers to increase students' awareness of contemporary practice and opportunities in the creative and cultural sectors to apply their experience
- ensure that progress monitoring and written feedback for sixth form students is appropriately timed and targets set are sufficiently challenging, to ensure that students reach their full potential, for example, ensure that students improve the quality of research and first hand visual content in sketchbooks.

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

Sandra Tweedie
Additional Inspector