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Mrs C Robson
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Dear Mrs Robson

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 10 and 11 February 2009 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, 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 senior staff, the lead teacher and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, and observations of five lessons or part lessons.

Art and design

Overall effectiveness was judged good.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are good.

- The school's baseline drawing assessment in Year 7 indicates that, as in their other subjects, many students start below average. By Year 9 the majority of boys and girls reach average standards in a range of two and three-dimensional and digital media. Evidence of their ability to show how ideas, observations and experiments progress, or how their ability to review and refine work develops, is limited by the lack of sketchbooks. However, research projects completed in Year 8 show

that students are able to collect and present information about different artists to support their practical work.

- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the 'tailored learning curriculum' (TLC) make particularly good progress in response to smaller working groups, an enriched curriculum and high expectations set by a team of supportive staff. Students recently arrived in the country, at an early stage of learning English, also progress quickly in their art and design lessons.
- A below average but rising proportion of boys and girls continue into Years 10 and 11. Students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, progress well in their use of particular media to achieve GCSE grades well above national averages. Many students do exceptionally well in relation to their other subjects. Revisiting work following evaluation with their teacher at the end of Year 10 helps the students reach challenging targets, particularly in two-dimensional media.
- Students showed particular strengths in the development of imaginative ideas which are well composed and effectively interpreted through confident use of colour and precisely executed designs. However, they are less confident 'taking risks' by experimenting with techniques, increasing the scale of work or integrating digital media.
- Exciting wire sculptures and large papier-mâché heads show early promise in Year 7. However, whilst three-dimensional work is well crafted it is used less frequently by students. Occasionally, GCSE students dare to mix media or explore two and three dimensions through relief work, but textiles or print remains underused as a way of fully pursuing ideas.
- Students show interest in their art lessons, enjoying opportunities to absorb themselves in practical 'making'. Behaviour is good. In discussion students are reflective and sensitive when expressing views about the work of their peers. They are thoughtful about the concept of creativity. At GCSE students are particularly productive and many support the after school opportunities to continue or improve work.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- The impact of teaching on learning is good overall but more consistent at Key Stage 4. However, the following features underpinned the most effective art and design teaching across key stages.
 - Information and communication technology (ICT) was used to juxtapose carefully chosen images and text to make expectations clear without prescribing an outcome.
 - Succinct and well presented guidance enabled the students to see clearly how to meet project or examination objectives, encouraging self review and informing their preparation for lessons.
 - Individual support during lessons was well judged, based on good knowledge of different students and their ability to work independently or collaboratively.

- Demonstration by the teacher enabled the students to gain an insight into teachers' expertise and enjoyment as an artist without undervaluing students' skills and imagination.
- Less effective teaching was evident where:
 - students were clear about what to do but not why they were doing it. Activities rather than objectives made it harder for teachers and students to measure their success at the end of lessons
 - lessons were efficiently managed and prepared but inspirational experiences in lessons or through use of external stimuli were limited
 - insufficient negotiation between students' ideas and interests and those of the teacher led to either disproportionate challenge in relation to students' ability or outcomes too similar for different students
 - students capable of inspiring others, for example through exhibition, demonstration or explanation about the purpose and meaning of their work were given too few opportunities.
- There are good plans to develop a shared teaching space which adjoins the studios, where larger or mixed-media work can be pursued, stimulating more collaboration between students and different teachers.

Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 provides an adequate range of experience as part of an art, design and technology curriculum that aims to promote the use of media such as textiles and resistant materials across both subjects. Whilst this provides a sound basis to develop students' sensitivity to craft and design, at Key Stage 4 most students still pursue fine art approaches indicating that the curriculum concept is not yet fully realised by the students.
- At Key Stage 4 teachers make a determined effort to broaden students' horizons to encourage the spontaneity valued post-16. For example, by introducing printmaking, collage or a more expressive approach to drawing. However, most students revert back to approaches with which they have more experience, control and guaranteed success.
- The balance between references to contemporary art and other times is a strength at Key Stage 4. Links with Tate Modern also introduce students to work known internationally whilst visiting artists such as an annual visit by a stone carver provide a more local perspective. Whilst the use of contemporary art, craft and design is less established in Years 7 to 9 a recently introduced 'graffiti' project has proven popular.
- Staff working with the TLC group interpreted a well designed curriculum model developed by the Leicester City Arts and Museum Service. This involved students' visit to New Walk Museum to see the work of arts and crafts designer Ernest Gimson who worked locally, contrasted with contemporary work by Andrew Tanner, Sally-Rose

Renner and Rachel Grevatte. School staff had given careful consideration to how students would understand the concept of 'craft'.

- Students receive sound guidance about why they should consider an examination course in art and design and the opportunities that exist to continue an art related course post-16. The lead art and design teacher has produced an attractive and informative leaflet to increase parents' understanding about vocational opportunities in the creative and cultural sector. Students interviewed expressed concern that choosing the subject often conflicted with their parents' views. Whilst examples such as a calendar and 'T' shirt design project exist, the purpose of projects could contribute more to students' wider understanding about the applications of art, craft and design.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- There is a clear leadership and management structure providing a voice for the subject at senior and middle leadership level, informed by the lead teacher who has established a specific contribution for the subject within the art, design and technology faculty and large school in which many subjects perform well. Nevertheless, the art specialists contribute very different approaches which could be developed more formally to ensure that responsibility and innovation is assumed by all.
- The subject has a less distinctive identity at Key Stage 3, experienced by all students. More prominence could be given to key subject skills such as the role of observation and drawing to ensure that when students focus on other aspects of art, design and technology, these skills are reinforced by teaching about their application in different contexts. Art staff plan to apply resistant materials to art and design.
- Judgements in the subject self-evaluation are accurate and well informed. The lead teacher uses continuous professional development judiciously to address areas for development. Links with the Creative Partnerships initiative demonstrate the value of sustained partnerships between school and creative and cultural sectors. However, the impact on experiences for all students is an area for further development.
- Whilst the school lacks an exhibition space to do justice to the highest quality work, a plasma screen projecting the work of students is used effectively. Senior leaders are well aware of the potential impact of the visual arts on school environment and ethos. The school buildings and creativity are high on the whole school agenda for change.
- The faculty has defined its ethos which embraces inclusion and creativity. However, this could be more explicit to students by showing, for example, how particular schemes of work or lessons aim to promote the faculty ethos or whole school aims. The views of students are used to inform improvement and those expressed during the visit were carefully considered and capable of inspiring other students.

Subject issue: The impact of provision on students' ability to 'think and act like artists, working creatively and intelligently'

This is satisfactory.

- Fundamental changes to the new subject curriculum at Key Stage 3 are not yet fully realised. However, the lead teacher has developed a version of the new levels of attainment in 'student speak' to ensure that students and staff increase their understanding.
- Some initiatives take students effectively into the mindset of artists. For example, contributing to the Creativity Manifesto led by Tate Modern has had a profound impact on participating students and their awareness of creative and cultural issues in contemporary society.
- Where students work directly with practising artists their understanding is also deepened. However, not all students gain an insight into thinking and acting like artists by working with them. The lack of sketchbooks in Key Stage 3 is a missed opportunity for all pupils to learn how and why some artists consider sketchbooks, journals and sourcebooks essential tools that continuously inform their work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increase students' direct experience of the work of artists, craftworkers and designers and their use of direct observation
- develop students' understanding about how and why different artists work in different ways including the purpose of experimentation
- promote links between the subject and the creative industries and make vocational opportunities explicit to students and their parents.

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