

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045  
F 020 7421 6855  
www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Ms P Kane  
Headteacher  
Whalley Range High School  
Wilbraham Road  
Manchester  
M16 8GW

Dear Ms Kane

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2 and 3 March 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 curriculum on students to act and think 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 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.

- Students have below average attainment and experience of a varied range of art and craft on entering the school. Their confidence and particularly skills in drawing and use of colour improve steadily during Year 7 to Year 9. The new Key Stage 3 curriculum in art and design has been arranged in a thematic way to support and stimulate creative thinking, working with drama and music. Students communicate well. They are thoughtful about their practice and enjoy the subject because of the opportunities to be creative.

- Students make good progress in Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4. Much of the work is highly imaginative, personal and shows the good standards of drawing, sensitive pattern making and painting skills achieved by many students. However, there is potential for further creative development and exploration. For example, applying these designs to a different context, media, process or scale, with the aim of developing further students' ability to think like artists and designers and understand the stages of the creative process more fully. A recent visit to Liverpool Tate to see the work of Gustav Klimt has stimulated individual progress and experimentation.
- Examination results at GCSE have shown a trend of steady improvement for A\*-C grades, which were very good in 2008. Students gained almost a grade higher compared to their other school subjects and results were just above the high national average for girls. First diploma in design students also achieved well and took part in interesting external exhibitions of their work. For example, they worked with artist Colette Gilman to produce prints and items of footwear inspired by Somali art which were then exhibited at the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester. They use the local environment effectively in projects using first hand experiences to develop their designs.
- The numbers taking sixth form courses are small but have increased this year. GCE A level results over the last three years show consistency, in that all students have achieved a pass. Art staff place emphasis in their subject improvement plans that students meet their target grades.
- Currently AS level students are working well, the school has an inclusive approach and some students have not studied art at GCSE level. They are gaining confidence in researching and developing their means of expression. At GCE A level there are some interesting and original ideas.

### Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- The large majority of lessons seen were good and well managed. Teachers used questioning effectively to help students think for themselves. Teachers have secure subject knowledge which is used appropriately, for example, to demonstrate a technique or inform one-to-one guidance. The art team has a wide range of specialisms to draw upon ranging from sculpture, fine art and photography to stage design. In the studios, they use displays of work to encourage students to analyse a process or strive for good standards of work. A useful addition would be an indication of the grades achieved and clearer breakdown of assessment criteria on how to improve work. There was some inconsistency between GCSE groups where some students were better informed than others about the assessment criteria and outcomes of individual projects.
- Students' sketchbooks and homework are closely integrated with lessons. Some projects, for example, the personal journals, encourage students to continue creative work at home successfully.

- Individual progress is monitored closely by art teachers through assessment for learning approaches in lessons and the standards of creative work produced. Students' individual progress is also monitored and recorded effectively at subject and for the whole school each half term. Regular meetings are held by managers with subject leads to identify students who are making good progress and those who may need extra subject support. Teachers keep good records. The 'whole school' strategies for monitoring progress are effective particularly at Key Stage 3 and 4 with the aim of ensuring that all students achieve their potential.

## Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- The new curriculum in Year 7 offers a good range of 2D and 3D media and processes; the key concept of creativity is central to activities.
- Schemes of work for all students are well considered and adapted or tailored to take advantage of the expertise of staff. In Key Stage 3 and 4, students experience a range of media and processes, the main focus is on painting, drawing, printmaking, 3D, mixed-media and some use of digital media. Projects are selected which will give students the opportunity to express their point of view. Some sensitive and very effective decorative work is being produced in the 'Journal on Identity' project in Year 9 and Year 10. Students enjoy embellishing the pages where they combine text and image inspired by the work of artist Teesha Moore.
- The school and art staff have been proactive in using visits and projects with designer makers and artists to stimulate students' creative working and increase awareness of the creative and cultural industries. Students generally have good awareness of the work of artists relevant to their work, occasionally more able students could extend references beyond the usual ones suggested. Art work is prominently displayed throughout school to celebrate students' achievements.

## Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The subject and also faculty leader for expressive arts, acting in a temporary role, has worked effectively with the art team and the support of senior staff, to minimise the impact of some unavoidable staff absence. The subject review and analysis of performance are thorough. Improvement targets are firmly focussed on whole school priorities and planning for the new art curriculum. There are good arrangements for staff to take part in continuous professional development, these have included examination standardisation meetings, new assessment tracking recording methods and subject updates for individual staff.
- Available resources are organised and managed carefully. The accommodation consists of some large, well lit, studio spaces but

rooms are not located together. Technician help has increased recently which has proved beneficial to facilitating wider use of media and more active learning. An example of this support is when teachers hold in-depth project days with particular Year 10 and Year 11 students to improve their performance. Teachers work closely with a neighbouring school to arrange realistic examination experience. Manchester Metropolitan University PGCE students worked as 'artists in residence' in the art department during enrichment week.

- The capacity for further improvement is good based on the quality assurance processes which are in place in the school.

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

This is good.

- The new curriculum scheme of work for Year 7 composed of thematic projects is generating some lively group work linking music, art and drama. Students are acquiring good communication skills and creative curiosity. In additional art lessons students are developing good observational drawing skills, for example on their project on 'Identity'. Students in Year 7 also take part in weekly cross-curriculum project days based on the local environment. Students have made several external visits to appreciate the context of art and presented their 3D final projects to each other.
- The school and art staff has been proactive in using visits and projects with designer makers and artists to stimulate students' creative working and understanding. There are recent interesting examples which include summer workshops, a cross curriculum Creative Partnership Enquiry Project, working with students with learning disabilities and difficulties, to explore literacy through drama and art. Year 9 gifted and talented students worked with artist Jennifer Collier in mixed media explorations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- widen the range of approaches currently used, for example, exploring and developing the potential of existing work or projects into other media, different scale or contexts, with the aim of encouraging students to have a fuller understanding of the stages of the creative process
- ensure consistency of information to the various GCSE groups so that all students are fully aware of assessment criteria, current progress and how they can improve their work.

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