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Ms V Crosher
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Dear Ms Crosher

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 four lessons.

Art and design

Overall effectiveness was judged good.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students start at the school with widely varying levels of skill and experience in art and design. However, current Year 7 work indicates that boys and girls, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, respond well to high expectations. Their sketchbook work exploring colour and emotion, and their fantasy insect sculptures, show

that students are able to reach good standards in two and three dimensional media.

- By Year 9 students are able to meet a higher level of challenge, evident in their individual contributions to a group project inspired by the artist Chuck Close. Their control of media and application of colour is particularly good. This project also shows that when the curriculum enables students to refine previously taught skills, standards are high.
- The students who choose to take a GCSE in the subject generally achieve standards at or above national averages. However, results in 2008 sharply declined due to the impact of staffing difficulties. Current work in Years 10 and 11 indicates that students are back on track to reach their target grades. Year 11 work includes examples of students whose work has improved dramatically since their earlier work.
- A significant strength of students' work in all years is the quality and range of their ideas. The emphasis on creative thinking, developed through the school's business and enterprise specialism, ensures that students understand the importance of originality. However, students do not always demonstrate their understanding about how or why other artists, craftworkers and designers develop different ideas.
- Students enjoy their current work in art and design because they value the guidance and reassurance of their teachers and opportunities to learn about unfamiliar media or methods of working. A good proportion of students take opportunities to continue work at lunch times, after school, or explore new experiences offered at Saturday workshops.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Improved teaching has had a very positive impact on students' learning and achievement. Nevertheless, the quality is variable.
- The following features underpinned the most effective art and design lessons:
 - students' self-evaluation and teacher assessment were integrated and used at key points, to maximise their impact on students' progress. Photographs of students' work made assessments work-specific
 - information and communication technology (ICT) was used to promote whole class discussion about contrasting images of significance to achieving the objectives for that particular lesson
 - individual support during lessons was well judged, based on good knowledge of different students and their ability to work independently or collaboratively. Paired work between students was managed well
 - demonstration and examples of work by the teacher enabled the students to gain an insight into teachers' expertise and enjoyment as an artist without undervaluing students' own skills and imagination
 - relationships between the teacher and students were reassuring and challenging, welcoming and assertive, clearly excited by students' ideas but authoritative when needed.
- The following characterised less effective teaching:

- students were clear about what to do but were less clear about the specific purpose of the lesson. Objectives that were too long or complex hindered students' review of their individual progress
- different activities were thought through in lesson plans but stimuli or approaches specifically designed to promote students' enjoyment, awe and wonder were limited
- students' use of resources was disorganised which exposed insufficient teaching about how students should manage their work space in order to work systematically and safely.
- Recent reorganisation and redecoration of the art and design studios has created suitable environments for learning. However, there are good plans to further improve provision, for example in the use of information and communications technology (ICT) to increase students' integration of digital media as a creative medium and application of skills developed through the school's business and enterprise status.

Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is well mapped to ensure that the National Curriculum programmes of study are adequately covered. The visual elements of art are identified clearly and the best lesson plans link clearly by emphasising key concepts.
- The overall contribution of the subject to cross-curricular themes is expressed well in documentation. However, links between schemes of work and lessons, and specific business and enterprise, literacy and numeracy, citizenship and personal development objectives are not clear enough.
- Curriculum themes are particularly successful when linked coherently. For example, in Year 8 human form and experience promotes good opportunities for students to explore their own interests and reflections whilst developing an understanding about other artists' responses to a similar theme. A visit to the National Portrait Gallery is now planned to ensure that all students will have experienced gallery-based education before making their examination options.
- Opportunities for students to specialise as they move onto examination courses in Key Stage 4 are starting to impact on the diversity of their work. However, whilst there is a satisfactory balance of two and three-dimensional opportunities students are not yet pursuing textiles, digital media, photography or graphics to the full.
- There is a well structured programme of optional sessions, in addition to lessons, available to all students. A series of Saturday workshops with practising artists also have a positive impact on standards. For example, a workshop with the artist Debbie Boon built on students' sound painting skills by developing their confidence and expressive skills. Artists are deployed strategically to reinforce the teaching.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- Judgements in the subject self-evaluation are accurate and well informed. A recent focus on the subject by senior leaders, as part of their monitoring and evaluation cycle, has contributed to a good understanding of existing strengths, weaknesses and potential of the subject to improve provision and outcomes more widely.
- The subject leader has made a significant impact on raising standards in the subject. Particularly impressive is her focus on improvement in all years, ensuring that improved GCSE results are only the beginning of a sustained period of innovation and improvement. Higher expectations have been skilfully communicated to the students.
- A strong feature of the department is the clarity and accuracy of advice given to students following assessment of their work. The high standards expected are explicit. Whilst students enjoy their lessons they also admit that success in the subject means hard work.
- Effective links exist with other schools. Liaison with a visual arts college in the local authority is productive. Work with other subject areas at the school is also developing. However, the monitoring and evaluation of cross-curricular themes is an area to strengthen, particularly in lessons, through discussions with students and analysis of their work.
- The subject leader has prioritised improvements sufficiently well to start developing innovations that could transform good into outstanding provision. For example, an area of the department has been re-designated as a potential gallery space, drawing on the principles of public and commercial galleries in order to enrich learning and maximise the business and enterprise culture of the school.

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

This is good.

- Good account has been taken of the significant changes to the secondary curriculum in Key Stage 3. A particular strength is the developing personalisation of students' targets and work. Creativity could be a clearer criterion for assessment, in line with the stronger emphasis in the assessment levels. However, the assessment approach used in Key Stage 3 has a positive impact on students' understanding about their progress, what is going well and what they need to do to improve. Their involvement in the process through peer assessment and student self-evaluation has started well.

Examples of good practice, which we discussed, included:

- standards achieved by students in their current work
- effective subject leadership focused clearly on improvement
- assessment approaches and records in Key Stage 3.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently high
- ensure that plans to increase the business and enterprise dimension of the subject are developed, evaluated and embedded

- ensure that students understand and articulate connections between their own work and that of other artists, craftworkers and designers.

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