

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



26 June 2009

Mrs M Rafee
Headteacher
Alperton Community School
Stanley Avenue
Wembley
HA0 4J

Dear Mrs Rafee

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: art and design and mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Gill Close HMI on 9 and 10 June 2009 to look at work in art and design and in mathematics.

As well as evaluating the subjects in relation to achievement and standards, the quality of provision, the leadership and management and inclusion, the art and design visit had a particular focus on:

'how well students 'learn to think and act as artists, craftspeople and designers, working creatively and intelligently' and 'develop an appreciation of art, craft and design, and its role in the creative and cultural industries that enrich their lives'

and the mathematics visit had a particular focus on:

'the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics.'

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting on the two subjects. 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 observation of a sample of lessons.

Art and design

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in art and design are good.

- From below average attainment on entry students make good progress during their first three years although standards remain below average by the end of Key Stage 3.
- Those studying the subject at GCSE continue to make good progress and standards are in-line with those nationally by the end of Year 11.
- The attainment of students taking art and design in the sixth form is below the national average overall on entry but they too make good progress with some doing exceptionally well from their starting points so that they reach average standards.
- Students enjoy the subject. Most behave well in lessons, sharing resources effectively and working well together.
- At all ages the students make good progress in relation to that in other subjects. However the girls make better progress than the boys and reach higher overall standards. This is because the girls sustain their focus for longer during lessons and, at examination level, are more systematic about fulfilling the requirements of the syllabuses.
- The students make good progress in using a range of media, especially in two dimensional work. They develop a good understanding of formal visual language such as line, tone and colour. Pattern-based work is of high quality, demonstrating good control of mark making for example when using paint or relief printing.
- The students make less progress in learning to refine and develop their ideas. This is reflected in the work of the older students who often pursue personal and varied responses to projects but are not always able to bring their work to a successful conclusion.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Lessons are well-paced with a good range of activities which build learning logically over time. Projects are structured logically over the longer term to include visual research and exploration.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and have high expectations for students' achievement. Relationships between students and teachers are good and students value the individual support given to them.
- The students' progress over time is monitored well and underachievement identified and tackled. Marking of students' work is useful but is better on older students' work because it explains how improvements can lead to the achievement of higher grades.
- While the tasks to be completed in lessons are made clear to students, some opportunities are missed to clarify the features of successful work and to check that students, notably the boys, understand these fully so they can take the initiative in assessing their own progress.
- A good range of strategies are used to support bi-lingual students such as visual exemplification and paired work.

- Careers and options advice is good. Subject staff do a good job in helping students understand the further education and employment opportunities afforded by the subject.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory.

- The students gain good experience of work on different scales and from varied starting points including the observed and imagined. The themes studied give a good introduction to key genre like portraiture.
- Good steps are taken to make links through the subject with the local community and the cultural heritages of the students, for example making costumes for the Diwali parade last year. The department has also held successful exhibitions of students' work to raise the profile of the subject amongst parents and carers.
- The students complete a good range of two-dimensional work. They gain some experience of working in three dimensions and using craft processes although this is not comprehensive enough.
- The internet is used well for research and some students have begun to make effective use of digital technology as a creative process, however the majority have insufficient opportunities to do this.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is well planned to develop skills in handling materials and address low attainment in areas such as observational drawing. However there are limited opportunities for students to develop personal responses to starting points. The curriculum for older students rightly encourages the development of unique outcomes. The students value this but need to have had more opportunities to think and work this way from a younger age.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The subject leader and assistant subject leader work well together to provide good direction for subject development. They are ambitious for further improvement and have a good track record of improving provision and raising achievement.
- Subject provision is monitored well through a good range of work scrutiny, data analysis, lesson observation and discussions with students. Priorities for further development are accurately identified but are sometimes not stated precisely enough in development plans and monitoring strategies lack focus to check the impact made.
- Staff work well as a team to share and develop ideas so that students' experience of learning is of consistent quality.
- The department is effective in supporting wider school aims, implementing systems such as student tracking and support for the large number of students for whom English is an additional language.

Subject issue: the extent to which students 'learn to think and act as artists, craftspeople and designers, working creatively and intelligently' and 'develop an appreciation of art, craft and design, and its role in the creative and cultural industries that enrich their lives'

This is judged to be satisfactory.

- Regular experience of the work of other creative practitioners, which is an element in all projects, gives students a good understanding that creative practice often builds on what has gone before.
- The range of work involved is satisfactory but students have too few opportunities to experience work at first hand by visiting galleries and museums or to work with creative practitioners themselves. Where this has happened, such as in a large scale installation completed by a group of students last term, the impact on achievement has been good and students have developed a good understanding of what artists do.
- The students develop satisfactory skills in analysing the work of others. They make good use of sketchbooks to record what they find out. Nevertheless the scarcity of first-hand contact with work and/or its maker means that they do not always understand deeply enough the process involved in producing the work. This means they sometimes apply superficial aspects of what they see rather than using it to inform a response which is more uniquely their own.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the features of successful work are always clear to students and challenge them, especially the boys, to think more independently about how to improve their work to fulfil their intentions
- broadening the curriculum to give students more comprehensive experience of work in three dimensions and use of digital technology as well as direct experience of creative practitioners and their work
- improving subject development by making sure priorities are measurable and that monitoring activities focus sharply on them.

Mathematics

The overall effectiveness of the subject, mathematics, was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is outstanding and standards are above average.

- Students make outstanding progress at each key stage and have done so consistently in recent years. They join the school with attainment that is well below average and reach standards that are average at the end of Key Stage 3 and above average at the end of Key Stage 4. Students who take A level have below average attainment on entry and make exceptionally high progress, reaching average standards. The

small group who study further mathematics make satisfactory progress.

- All groups of students achieve at least as expected. The school analyses results scrupulously and takes effective steps to improve the results of any group not doing as well as others. Through additional support during lunch time it has successfully raised the progress of students of African and Caribbean heritage.
- The school has identified correctly that achievement in using and applying mathematics is a little lower than that in the subject overall and has prioritised improvement. It recognises that some students do not understand why a method works as well as they might, even when they are proficient at using it.
- Students enjoy mathematics a great deal and feel extremely well supported in gaining confidence and making progress. They work very conscientiously, behave well and are keen to succeed.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is outstanding.

- The outstanding teaching, support, tracking and intervention, as well as students' own very good efforts, lead to their outstanding progress.
- Strengths in teaching are teachers' good subject knowledge and high expectations. Teachers ensure that each student is able to access the work and they provide assistance within and after lessons to make certain they can do so. Teachers give clear and accurate explanations, often using interactive whiteboards well to illustrate them. Lessons progress at a fast pace with a variety of activities. Students arrive promptly, settle down quickly and complete a great deal of work.
- Much teaching is consistently good or better. In the strongest lessons, teachers' very good knowledge of each student is used exceptionally well to group them and challenge them with interactive practical activities that help them to discuss and understand what they are learning. These lessons develop well the students' skills in using and applying mathematics, which teachers extend through adept questioning. Students explore mathematical concepts using information and communication technology (ICT) to give them a fuller understanding, for example of graphs. Students say that they find these lessons interesting and fun.
- There is some variation in teaching quality. In a few lessons, work does not challenge all students well, being too easy or hard for some, and staff do not circulate effectively to monitor understanding and adapt work accordingly. Students take responsibility for marking much of their work, but it is sometimes unclear whether unmarked work is right or wrong and at other times students focus more on writing down correct answers than on understanding why the method works. Students say that they would welcome more opportunities for group work, discussion and use of ICT.
- Assessment is regular and students know the National Curriculum level or GCSE grade they are working at. They record their test marks and areas for improvement, but there is room for them to be more consistently involved in self-assessment in relation to each lesson and

of how to improve on their overall National Curriculum level or GCSE grade.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is outstanding.

- The schemes of work underpin students' outstanding progress through their quality and detail, and by rapidly being adapted in the light of evaluation. They flexibly meet individual needs, for example through providing additional resources and staff support for those who are at early stages of learning English and through challenge for higher attainers that develops the breadth and depth that enables them to do well at GCSE and subsequently at A level.
- The school's and department's innovative approaches to the curriculum are a real strength. Very well designed cross-curricular activities focussing on personal, learning and thinking skills, tasks to develop functional skills and new approaches to assessment are all being tried out and evaluated.
- There are many opportunities for students to use and apply mathematics, benefit from conceptual introductions to topics and have hands-on experience of ICT across the mathematics curriculum, although there is room for these to be developed to ensure more consistency for all students.
- Statistics is available as a GCSE option. There is a large take-up of mathematics in the sixth form where there is a choice of Year 13 units for A level and the opportunity to study further mathematics.
- Comprehensive support in revising for examinations, including after school and lunch sessions, is very popular and effective.
- The specialism in mathematics and computing has had a marked impact on achievement. It has improved resources in terms of teaching rooms, ICT hardware such as interactive whiteboards, software and staffing, allowing smaller sets and the provision of statistics GCSE and further mathematics.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are outstanding.

- They are exemplified by the meticulous approach to evaluation and planning, which are well linked and focused carefully on improving each student's progress. Honest and accurate evaluation constantly seeks ways to improve and rapidly informs well-targeted action, which is a hallmark of excellence.
- Efficient and accurate systems of collecting information through lesson observation, book checks and students' views are summarised astutely to identify accurately the strengths and areas for development. Lessons observed jointly were evaluated accurately with pertinent points for improvement identified. Teachers provide perceptive and honest evaluation of their lessons, and the clarity of analysis that enables their teaching to improve continuously.

- The members of the department work very well together, sharing responsibilities and tasks effectively. Line management supports frequent evaluation of progress on all actions planned and holding of the department to account.
- The rigorous system of regular assessment and tracking of progress, with the quick identification of potential underachievement and provision of intervention, ensures that no student falls through the net and overall progress is outstanding.

Subject issue: the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

- There are very good systems for supporting mathematics teachers in improving the quality of their teaching. The department is also helping a teaching assistant to develop teaching skills. Staff share good practice at each of the departmental meetings and through joint planning. The head of department knows well the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and uses this knowledge to help all improve, for example through selecting carefully those who lead on each action planned so that it helps them to share or to improve their practice.
- Lesson observations are constructive and supportive. They identify key areas for development. Follow-up through performance management is methodical.
- The recently appointed advanced skills teacher has already made a strong impact on the quality of teaching and learning, supporting well the specific areas for development of individual staff. The school's advanced practitioner roles have provided successful cross-subject support such as through staff observing others who have strengths in their areas for development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- enhancing systems for planning and monitoring to ensure entitlement for all students to conceptual introductions and use of ICT
- broadening students' use of self-assessment of their progress in lessons and against national criteria.

We hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art and design and mathematics in 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

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector