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Dear Mr Roper

Ofsted survey inspection programme - art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 and 15 May 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 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'. 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 observation of a sample of lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- The students make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 developing knowledge, skills and understanding in line with those expected by the end of Year 9. A smaller proportion than seen nationally exceed the expected levels and the boys make less progress than the girls overall.
- An average proportion of each year group opt to study the subject at GCSE. The number gaining an A*-C grade has risen in recent years and is similar to the national picture although the proportion gaining A*-A grades has remained below average. Boys make similar progress to girls but have lower starting points so reach lower standards overall.

- The students enjoy the subject and most behave well in lessons. They particularly like exploring the tactile properties of materials and processes. For example both Year 9 and 10 students demonstrated good skills in joining clay and Year 8 students used papier-mâché effectively in making small sculptures.
- Sketchbooks are well established among younger students as a place to store research materials. Because GCSE students keep folders of work but not sketchbooks some opportunities are lost to use them as a forum for the speculative development of work.
- Students' skills in evaluating and refining their ideas are an area of relative weakness. This affects boys more than girls but leaves some from both groups reliant on teachers for guidance. It results in a lack of individuality in responses to projects in Key Stage 3 and hampers older students in developing the personal quality in their portfolios necessary to gain the highest GCSE grades.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are satisfactory.

- The teachers are enthusiastic and have good relationships with students. They work hard to prepare lessons, for example by researching artists or setting up demonstrations of technique.
- Rooms are well organised with equipment and display arranged effectively to support learning and make the best use of time.
- Teachers are good at managing tasks in lessons, including complex activities as seen in a Year 9 lesson where different groups were printing, using clay and painting. Students said that lessons are exciting because of the emphasis on practical activities.
- Teachers explain clearly to students what they are to do in lessons but are less effective at communicating the features of successful work. In these circumstances it is difficult for the students to take the initiative in improving their own work. Some opportunities are missed during discussions and questioning to test students' understanding of what they are doing and to encourage critical thinking about the next steps.
- The students' attainment on entry is established carefully and their progress over time is monitored well. Good use is made of assessment information to plan the next tasks for each class as a whole but too little use is made of what is known about each student's attainment to adapt lesson content to meet their individual needs.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory.

- The curriculum offered in the first three years gives students a systematic introduction to the formal visual elements and to working on different scales in two and three dimensions. A strong structure within each project ensures that students complete each stage but limits the scope for them to develop varied outcomes.
- The curriculum at GCSE ensures satisfactory progression and has seen some appropriate developments in response to student need. For

example textiles is offered as an area of specialist study and a 'double award' course was made available this year for the first time.

- Project themes are well chosen to ensure students get a good introduction to established genre such as landscape with the school's rural location supporting some of the work undertaken. Some promising initial steps have been taken to appeal more to boys, for example through a new Year 8 project centred on Picasso's Guernica.
- Older students are beginning to make use of information and communication technology (ICT) as an expressive medium but students have too few opportunities of this kind in Key Stage 3.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are satisfactory.

- The subject leader is committed to the development of the department. She has enjoyed success in recent years in raising the proportion of students gaining good grades at GCSE, developing the curriculum and improving the tracking of students' progress.
- The subject team is small but the subject leader also leads the technology faculty and this helps ensure good teamwork and sharing of resources with a wider group of staff.
- The monitoring of provision is satisfactory. Strengths and weaknesses are identified reasonably well through scrutiny of students' work, reference to assessment information and observations of lessons. However priorities for improvement are imprecise in development plans and it is not always clear how they will be brought about or their impact on students checked.
- Satisfactory links are made with local arts networks such as an arts organisation in a nearby city although there is scope to develop these further so as to support the curriculum more systematically.

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 links are made in projects to the work of creative practitioners. This successfully reinforces students' understanding that the work of others can support their learning. Good use is made of the internet for research and older students have some opportunities to visit galleries but younger students would also benefit from having such experiences.
- The links to creative practitioners are well-considered but largely reflect the period up to the twentieth century. While some references are to contemporary practice, these form too small an element of the students' diet to give them an understanding of current developments.
- The students develop satisfactory skills in analysing the work of others and many keep careful notes or studies. However they do not always develop a deep enough understanding of the work in order to exploit

what they learn and their work in response tends toward pastiche of rather than being a catalyst for something original.

- A small number of students have worked with creative practitioners such as a local painter but most have not. This means that few students have witnessed a professional practitioner going through aspects of the creative process such as the development of ideas which are an area of relative weakness in their own work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve teaching and learning by:
 - making more use of assessment information to plan activities which are adapted to meet students' differing needs
 - ensuring the characteristics of successful work are made clear to students and that they are challenged to think more independently about how to make their own work successful, notably the boys
- broaden the curriculum by giving students more exposure to contemporary creative practice, including by experiencing creative practitioners at work and by using ICT as an expressive medium
- make sure that subject development priorities are built systematically into strategic plans and that it is clear how they will be brought about and their impact on students' learning will be measured.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art and design 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