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Mr W Hutcheson
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Dear Mr Hutcheson

Ofsted survey inspection programme - art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 29 April 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, 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 good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- The majority of students arrive with low levels of skills and knowledge in the subject and low expectations of what they can achieve.
- They make good progress from their starting points due to effective support that raises their self-esteem and ability to sustain work during lessons and over time. Although standards remain well below the national average by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, a significant number of students gain accredited qualifications in Key Stage 4. Their achievement in the subject is regularly among the stronger areas of their performance.

- Behaviour in art and design lessons is good. The students learn to collaborate well and show respect for their materials and equipment. They often demonstrate very good progress in social skills as compared to their level of development on joining the school.
- The students respond particularly positively to exploring art-based processes through tactile investigation. For example students of various ages made mixed-media collages based on masks and used materials such as string or shells inventively.
- Progress is slower in learning to refine and develop work from stage to stage so as to bring it to a resolved outcome. As a result the students are sometimes overly dependent on teachers to decide the next steps.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Teachers and teaching assistants work well together so that lessons are purposeful and the students feel well supported.
- The staff are committed to the students' success and have high expectations. They pay careful attention to students' individual needs, including their subject attainment, when planning activities.
- Most of the students enjoy lessons because they contain interesting and varied tasks and because their relationships with staff are positive. The staff have excellent skills in managing students' behaviour and engaging them in learning. For example discussions are used well to explore ideas and to develop students' social skills.
- The staff provide well-considered support materials for students such as visual prompts showing the stages of tasks and guidance for older students in preparing for GCSE examinations.
- The progress made by each student is tracked carefully both in their subject and personal development. The staff have regular discussions with each student about their progress but opportunities are missed to challenge them to think independently about what to do next and to record the outcomes on their tracking sheets for future reference.
- The school's on-going rebuilding and relocation programme means the learning environment is excellent. The main subject room is spacious and well-organised and the majority of students enjoy learning in it.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- The curriculum is adapted well to meet students' needs, for example an entry level course is provided at Key Stage 4 for those not working at GCSE level.
- The students receive a good introduction to a range of materials and techniques and to work on a variety of scales in two and three dimensions. They have good opportunities to use information and communications technology in the subject with significant investment in computers and software as part of the school refurbishment.
- The students complete a good balance of work in fine-art and in design disciplines but have relatively little exposure to craft-based activity.

- Aspects of the visual language are taught in a logical order and are revisited so as to reinforce learning. For example colour is covered in some detail in Year 7 in order to provide a basis for later work.
- The curriculum is popular with students who respond well to the themes covered and to the variety of starting points. The staff are successful in adapting projects to meet individual student's interests.
- Projects are clearly structured to build learning progressively and to give students the confidence to move from stage to stage. This is an appropriate response to their learning difficulties, which hinder personal organisation in many cases, and to the poor attendance of some. While the students like the security offered it means some do not pursue as personal a direction in their work as they are capable of.
- Effective use is made of local resources such as museums and galleries, including those in central London, in order to enrich learning.
- The subject makes a good contribution to the school's extended status where art activities are offered after via after-school clubs.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The subject leader does a good job in developing subject provision and has made a good impact over time on the quality of students' experiences and on their achievement.
- She works well with the school's senior leadership and with other subject leaders to ensure that school-wide expectations are met for example in the quality of teaching and in assessing students' progress.
- The subject leader works hard to build professional relationships with outside partners such as museums and galleries as well as remaining aware of best practice in meeting the needs of students at the school.
- Subject evaluation is good and involves careful analysis of students' work and of their responses in lessons so as to identify what could be better. Subject development planning contains a good range of further priorities although it is not clear how some of them are to be brought about or the impact on students is to be checked.

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 overall.

- The students make good progress in understanding that the work of other creative practitioners is an important source of learning because staff regularly make reference to the work of such people in lessons.
- The staff plan references to the work of other creative practitioners carefully albeit with relatively little reference to craft or to the distinct features of craft as opposed to art and design disciplines.

- The staff take good account of the needs of their students when planning how to use books, the internet or visits to galleries to support learning.
- Good progress is made in learning to analyse the work of other creative practitioners because staff use a consistent approach to these activities. Many students require considerable support in identifying the main features of the work in order to apply them in their own work.
- The students do not have opportunities to experience creative practitioners at work at first-hand. This weakens their understanding of key aspects of the creative process, such as refining and developing ideas and means they miss out on learning directly about techniques used from professionals working in creative areas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure that students are encouraged wherever possible to make decisions independently about developing their work to realise their intentions
- give the students first-hand experience of creative practitioners at work in order to provide a model of practice for the students to apply in their own work and to enrich their learning of skills
- define clearly how the priorities for subject development are to be brought about and their impact on the students checked.

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