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Miss S Samwell  
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Dear Miss Samwell

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 6 and 7 May 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 subject leader and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observations of five lessons and four extra-curricular sessions.

Art and design

Overall effectiveness was judged good.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are good overall. GCSE results are excellent.

- Students start at the school with average subject skills and knowledge overall. Boys and girls, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and gifted/talented pupils, make good progress. Their mixed-media portraits show that by Year 8 many students are able to handle two-dimensional media particularly well. The quality and range

of Year 8 work inspired by Cubism is above average, demonstrating that students are able to interpret the work of other artists individually. Their knowledge of craftworkers and designers is more limited.

- The subject is a very popular examination option both in lessons and as an extra-curricular opportunity to gain an additional GCSE. Students consistently emphasised the importance of the subject as challenging and hard work but nevertheless a welcome balance to their more academic studies. Sketchbook work and two-dimensional outcomes are strengths. A small proportion of art and design students have expressed interest in taking the Creative and Media Diploma option.
- Boys and girls consistently achieve GCSE results well above the high standards achieved nationally. In line with national trends, the subject remains more popular and successful for girls. Students are responding enthusiastically to strategies in Year 9 to widen appeal. For example, topics such as 'Superheroes' that emphasise the use of imagination, and approaches such as those used in graphics to use ICT to design for a purpose, are proving effective. However, representational work using traditional painting techniques dominate examination work.
- Sixth form students were observed responding well to an experimental drawing challenge. Several students have also broadened their skills by participating in 'life drawing' classes at the nearby college alongside experienced and talented adults. Technically, their work progresses well, resulting in larger scale, skilfully crafted work. However, the depth of meaning and creativity of connections to the work of other artists varies widely.
- Students are conscientious and co-operative. They express positive views and sensitive criticisms about the work of other students. They particularly value the individual support and guidance provided by their art and design teacher. Their independence progresses as their confidence in the subject increases. Nevertheless, more students could lead learning, for example by demonstrating their skills or explaining the purpose and meaning of their work to younger students.

## Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Teacher assessment is exemplary. Individual comments and targets are used regularly to identify particular qualities and opportunities to improve aspects of work. The students appreciate that advice is tailored to their individual needs. Assessment slips and 'post-its' attached to work relates marking explicitly to examples. Good dialogue between teachers and individual students complements this approach.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to inspire the students. The expectations of students are exemplified in powerpoint presentations that use layout, colour, text and imagery to a very professional standard. The quality of display across the school is equally high, showing students how to present work using eye-catching, informative and persuasive techniques.
- All teachers use the work of other students skilfully. In one lesson examples of previous students' work with their self-evaluations deepened the students' understanding and thinking about their own

work. At the end of a different lesson two contrasting examples of students' work were chosen to promote the concept of creativity.

- Teachers use demonstration confidently, emphasise specialist vocabulary regularly and manage resources efficiently. However, a high proportion of teacher talk sometimes restricts opportunities to involve students more actively in leading the learning, for example by sharing their skills and understanding or initiating questions.
- Particularly good written guidance is provided in preparation for examination courses. This strengthens students' understanding of objectives. Specific skills sessions are also effective in re-establishing pace and reinforcing key skills during long periods of coursework.

## Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 introduces students to a range of 2D and 3D experiences and, more recently, work in digital media. There is adequate reference to artists from different times and cultures, but craftworkers and designers are less explicit. Linked to this, the purpose of work is often exclusively aesthetic. Projects that use ICT are beginning to broaden students' understanding about the applications of the subject in the creative industries.
- Subject matter is suitably wide ranging and enables students to revisit the natural and made world, human experience and identity. The school buildings and grounds are used as a stimulus in students' early work. Students say that lessons are particularly rewarding when teachers 'take them out of their comfort zone' through their expectations of how they might use different art media. Nevertheless, students' interpretation of themes often remains conservative.
- Gallery visits in all key stages are a strength of provision. These are thoughtfully timed to enable students to respond to what is for many their first experience of visiting an art gallery. There are also good plans to use the work of students around the school to introduce skills for students to apply in a gallery context. In Year 12 engagement with contemporary work had a profound impact on the depth and direction of work by several students. The use of contemporary work with younger students is at an early stage, particularly creative practitioners in the locality. There is good experience to build on across the arts.
- Connections between the work of other artists and objectives for students are of variable depth. The most complex connections are not necessarily made by the most experienced students. A good example observed was where a Year 10 group learned about chiaroscuro by being introduced to a contemporary photographer whose work drew on classical paintings. Students used their breadth of knowledge to develop a depth of understanding, evident in their own use of photographic research.
- Extra-curricular opportunities are good. In all years students are able to continue work beyond timetabled lessons. Provision of a sixth form studio contributes significantly. For students unable to accommodate the subject within their timetable additional opportunities to take a

GCSE after school are popular. Drawing and painting predominates but different staff provide an increasing range of specialisation.

## Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- Systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning across the school has impacted on consistently good subject provision and outcomes for students. The subject leader, in her first year in the role, is in a good position to build on a trend of high GCSE achievement in the subject by drawing on a range of expertise within the department and through collaboration with Design and Technology and the Expressive arts.
- The subject has a good presence across the school, achieved through display work in many public areas and different departments, and through active participation in the school's performing arts specialism. Outreach to primary schools in the specialist partnership includes workshops for students and staff. There is currently no baseline assessment of students' starting points in the subject when they transfer in Year 7.
- Subject specific self-evaluation is at an early stage. In particular, the links between monitoring, evaluation and development planning in the subject are unclear. For example, development targets for teaching and learning make little use of the sophisticated data about teaching and learning gathered by the school in its quest to progress from good to outstanding. However, subject targets are explicitly related to whole school improvement priorities.
- Subject policies are generally good. The department has a clear view about its distinctive contribution to the school and this is shared by the students. Policies have a clear impact on the quality of provision. For example, there are clear expectations about the management of gallery visits.

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

This is good.

- Some account has been taken of the significant changes to the secondary art and design curriculum in Key Stage 3 and further development is planned. Assessment approaches used in Key Stage 3 have a positive impact on students' understanding about their own 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 is good. However, the stronger emphasis in the assessment levels on creative development is an area to strengthen.
- The integration of a gallery visit in Key Stage 3 contributes to students' understanding about how different artists think and act. Overall the subject curriculum focuses on the outcomes of different artists' work more often than their processes. Teachers bring technique to life

through demonstration. Nevertheless, more units of work could explore how different artists work, for example in using sketchbooks.

Examples of good practice, which we discussed, included:

- the standards achieved by students in their two-dimensional work
- the use of gallery visits with students in all key stages
- the quality and impact of assessment and marking in particular
- the extra-curricular opportunities that make taking GCSE inclusive.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- enable students to use their own observations, experiences and feelings as a resource in their own work and as a stimulus to others
- ensure that students progress in deepening the connections between their own work and that of other artists, craftworkers and designers
- encourage older students to diversify in their use of two, three-dimensional or digital media including non-representational work
- use monitoring and evaluation to inform development planning.

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