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Mrs J Nuthall  
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Dear Mrs Nuthall

Ofsted survey inspection programme - art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23 June 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 good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- The students achieve well in the subject at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form irrespective of the complexity or nature of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The standards reached remain well below those of most students of their ages.
- The school enters Key Stage 4 and sixth form students for a range of Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) qualifications within which they achieve well in the art and design related aspects in relation to their starting points.

- Enjoyment of learning is a strong feature of lessons and is central to the good progress made by the students. They learn to be proud of their work through feeling happy about what they achieve. Students spoken to were keen to show displays of their work around the school.
- The students make good progress in exploring the tactile properties of materials. This was evident in a Key Stage 3 session where the students used clay as a drawing material, handling it with enthusiasm in response to music.
- The quality of the students' independent decision making about their artwork develops well. Although some are dependent on adults to physically engage with the making process their work increasingly reflects individual responses to the stimulus from which they work as well as highlighting aspects of their personalities and interests.
- Subject study is used well to support the students' wider personal development through learning to sustain focus on an activity and in areas of social development such as interaction with others and following rules and routines. More able students are helped to take responsibility for their work.

### Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Teachers and teaching assistants have high expectations of what students can achieve. They are adventurous in their teaching, offering the students exciting activities which entail considerable organisation. As a result lessons are lively, have a good pace for learning but are conducted in conditions where students can try things out safely.
- Teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is good. Effective communication between them in advance of lessons ensures that the students are well supported because the role of each adult is clear.
- Relationships between adults and students are very positive. Adults communicate well with students to enable them to participate and to interpret their intentions when supporting them in making their work. Adults provide helpful feedback and guidance to students.
- Multi-sensory experiences are sometimes used well to sustain students' focus on activities. For example a group making mixed-media collages based on Spanish fans were given fabrics to hold and shown images if their attention waned. However such resources are not always used well at the start of lessons to clarify the purpose of the learning and immerse students in the context for their activities.
- The students' progress in the subject over time is monitored closely and recorded in a wide range of images and commentaries from staff. These are used well to identify underachievement and to highlight where new approaches to individual student's learning are required.
- Activities are adapted well to meet students' overall needs. The adults judge well when to intervene and when not so that the work represents the creativity of the students rather than themselves. Nevertheless on some occasions opportunities are missed to adapt tasks finely in relation to the students' attainment in the subject itself.

## Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- The curriculum offers good progression from students' experiences before joining the school and good development of knowledge, skills and understanding once in school.
- Key Stage 3 sets the students up well for later study, offering access to a broad range of media and techniques, including the use of information and communications technology. The breadth of the offer reflects the schools determination that students should have equality of access to the experiences of other students of their age.
- The students' enjoyment of Key Stage 3 means that the subject is popular among older students when they are able to access it through studying for an ASDAN qualification and through an 'options' programme of subject study.
- Effective links are made between the subject and other curriculum areas and aspects of broader personal and social development. For example Key Stage 4 students made relief pieces based on healthy eating and an installation linked to their work on 'Goodnight Mr Tom'.
- The curriculum has been adapted well over time to meet the students' needs. There are appropriate plans for further developments in the light of the changing nature of the students joining Key Stage 3 to include more who exhibit challenging behaviour.
- Good use is made of extended opportunities for students and families to attend workshops after school.
- Some good links exist with other educational establishments. Students have completed useful projects in partnership with a nearby secondary school and some older students attend a local college of further education for part of their studies and make good progress as a result.

## Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The two subject leaders work well as a team. They are energetic and keen to develop the subject further, reflecting the value placed on creative activity by the school.
- The subject leaders are well qualified and provide effective guidance and support for their colleagues so that the quality of students' experiences is consistently good. They encourage their colleagues to develop their own approaches to the subject in order to meet their students' needs.
- A good range of information is gathered by subject leaders to inform them of strengths and weaknesses in subject provision. The most useful sources include work scrutiny, regular communication with colleagues and reference to tracking documents.
- Suitable priorities for subject development are outlined in the subject development plan and these link well to overall school aims.
- Effective links are made with outside partners to develop the subject. These include attendance at ASDAN moderation meetings and work with the local secondary school and college. However there is a need

for better links with the local arts community so as to enhance students' experience of creative practitioners at work.

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 encounter the work of a satisfactory range of creative practitioners through their studies. Projects are linked well to creative practice in different times, places and to male and female practitioners.
- Effective use is made of displays and of large plasma screens to show images of work so as to support students' own making. Students respond well to these and teachers use them confidently.
- Projects contain a good range of activities which model those used by creative practitioners such as experimenting freely and encouraging students to think about whether their intentions are being met.
- Teachers often do a good job of modelling creative practice such as by demonstrating techniques but the students have too few opportunities to experience creative practitioners' work directly. They have made some visits to galleries and other places of interest in the past and artists have worked in school. Where this has happened the impact on teaching and learning has been good but these opportunities are not regular or systematic enough to give students a good appreciation of what creative practitioners do so they can do it themselves.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure lessons:
  - consistently start with clear communication to the students of the purpose and context of their learning
  - are always adapted to meet the students' varying needs relating to their subject attainment as well as they are adapted to meet their overall personal, social and physical needs
- strengthen students' ability to think and act like artists, craftspeople and designers by giving them more experience of the work of, and working with, creative practitioners.

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