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Mrs L Gadd
Principal
The Harefield Academy
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Dear Mrs Gadd

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey programme: art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 23 and 24 November 2009 to look at work in art, craft and design.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, this visit had a particular focus on drawing.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews, scrutiny of documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of art, craft and design is inadequate.

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is inadequate.

- Students make progress in line with their peers in Years 7 and 8. However, they achieve standards below those seen nationally by the end of Key Stage 3. Finishing their studies in the subject in Year 8 constrains the development of skills, knowledge and understanding expected.
- The attainment of students starting GCSE is below that normally seen. They too make progress in line with their peers nationally. The standards achieved have been below average for some time, although there have been some improvements in the last two years.
- Students behave well in subject lessons and most have positive attitudes. These are not exploited fully to support their learning.

- Progress is satisfactory in learning to explore and control the properties of materials. However, students struggle to evaluate and refine their work because they lack clear understanding of what they are trying to achieve.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

The quality of teaching of art, craft and design is satisfactory.

- While teaching is satisfactory, it is not good enough to ensure Key Stage 3 students make the good progress needed in their two years of study.
- Teachers work hard to prepare lessons. These are well-structured and involve effective organisation of resources. Learning objectives are suitable but are not always modelled in sufficient depth for students to understand the purpose of their work. Some teaching is adapted well to meet students' differing needs but opportunities, such as whole-class questioning, are not tailored finely enough. An after-school club is valued by older students.
- Monitoring Key Stage 4 students' progress over time has improved in the last two years. Targets are more challenging and intervention is better when progress is too slow. Monitoring in Key Stage 3 is improving but does not systematically trigger similarly effective intervention.
- Students' work is recorded well in sketchbooks and marked regularly, with satisfactory guidance for improvement. However, students are not routinely challenged to respond to marking so as to move on.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

The quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design is inadequate.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum does not provide a comprehensive enough range of experiences. In particular, students have too few opportunities to use digital technology or to explore craft-based approaches to the subject.
- The number opting to study the subject at Key Stage 4 is below average. In part this is because students' sport-related work limits their choices. However, the narrow Key Stage 3 curriculum does not encourage them. Moving to a three-year Key Stage 4 is starting to provide more challenge, for example AS level is planned for Year 11 students. Nevertheless, it has yet to be exploited fully to widen the range of study available to students.
- Regular reference to the work of other creative practitioners ensures students know its value in supporting their own creativity. However they have too few opportunities to see such work at first hand, to deepen their experience of creative processes. Recent moves to take Key Stage 4 students to galleries are welcome but need to extend to younger students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

The effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design is inadequate.

- Subject leadership has made insufficient impact, over a number of years, on achievement and the quality of provision.
- Subject monitoring is ineffective in identifying all the areas of provision requiring improvement. The priorities in subject development plans link well to whole-school initiatives but lack detail in relation to the needs of the subject. Targets are not explicit enough to enable the impact of actions to be checked.
- Plans are underway to forge links with external partners, such as other schools, to enrich the work of the subject. However, these are at an early stage and have yet to make an impact on the quality of provision.

Subject issue: How effectively do students learn to draw confidently and creatively?

This aspect is inadequate.

- Students have regular opportunities to draw from observation but do not use a wide enough range of approaches to understand how, for example, different media affect the visual quality of the work made.
- There are too few opportunities for students to explore drawing as a means to generate or develop ideas; a weakness evident in the difficulties experienced by GCSE students in refining their work.
- Drawing is valued by teachers but is not systematically integrated into students' experiences so they are aware of the different ways it can be used to develop their creativity.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' progress and standards, especially in Key Stage 3, by:
 - ensuring they fully understand the purpose of their work and are challenged to think independently about how to realise their intentions
 - ensuring all aspects of lessons, including questioning, are adapted to meet the needs of students of different abilities
- broadening the curriculum so that students gain more experience of:
 - digital technology and craft-based approaches to creative practice
 - the work of creative practitioners at first hand, and working at first hand, so as to deepen their awareness of the creative process
- enhancing the impact of subject leadership and management by:
 - gathering a wider range of evidence to monitor the quality of provision and setting clear and measurable targets for the subject

- making a wider range of links with external partners so as to support the development of subject provision.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter 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