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27 October 2009

Mr G Nelson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Nelson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 12 and 13 October 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, the visit had a particular focus on how effectively students learn to draw confidently and creatively.

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 included interviews, scrutiny of documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is satisfactory.

- Students make satisfactory progress during lessons and over time. Their attainment is in line with the national average by the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE and AS- or A-level examinations.
- The progress made in the specialist areas of study offered at GCSE and AS or A-level varies widely because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Progress is strongest in photography and weakest in fine art.

- Sixth form students taking the vocational art and design course make good progress and their attainment is above the national average.
- Some students develop highly personal work through innovative use of materials and sensitive reference to other artists' work. However, significant numbers do not gain a deep enough awareness of how to use visual language to communicate their ideas successfully. Boys are more affected by this than girls so they make slower progress overall.
- Students have good attitudes to learning and behave well in lessons but do not always use enough initiative in developing their work.

### Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teachers are enthusiastic and have good subject skills. They use these well, for example to demonstrate techniques or to introduce artists' work. Lessons are usually structured well so that tasks are sequenced logically.
- Students' progress over time is monitored satisfactorily but some teachers make too little use of this information to tailor activities in lessons to meet students' individual needs fully.
- Students make good progress in the lessons where teachers help them to understand clearly what they are aiming to achieve and model effective assessment so that students can decide how to move on. However, this does not happen regularly enough in all lessons.
- Teachers' assessment of progress during lessons is satisfactory and occasionally good. Nevertheless, in too many lessons opportunities are missed to check the pace of learning and intervene if it is too slow.

### Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum gives a satisfactory introduction to the subject. Recent school-wide initiatives to develop better personal learning and thinking skills in Year 7 have yet to have an impact on attainment in the subject.
- Good numbers of students opt for the subject at GCSE and in the sixth form because there are a good range of specialist areas of study. In recent years, good steps have been taken to add to these with a vocational course in the sixth form and greater use of digital technology.
- Students gain a satisfactory introduction to other artists' work, including through gallery visits, but have too few opportunities to see them at work to witness the creative process in action.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- Committed leadership of the department as a whole has resulted in a successful broadening of the curriculum. However, leadership of particular aspects of the work of the department has had too little impact on the quality of provision.
- Subject development planning shows good ambition for improvement, including ensuring more consistent progress in all areas of the subject.
- Subject monitoring is satisfactory but does not always focus closely enough on the impact on students' learning when judging the quality of provision and defining the next priorities for development.
- The subject leader has a good awareness of current themes in creative practice and uses these well to support curriculum development.

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

This aspect is satisfactory.

- Students develop satisfactory skills in drawing but are more confident when recording from direct observation than when using drawing more imaginatively, for example to develop design ideas.
- The teaching of drawing is satisfactory. However, as in teaching overall, there is not always enough consideration of students' differing levels of attainment when planning their activities.
- The breadth of the curriculum for older students provides well for those lacking confidence in drawing, for example in allowing them to work through photography.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' progress by ensuring that:
  - activities in lessons are better matched to students' varying abilities
  - teachers use a wider range of strategies to check the progress being made during lessons and intervene if it is too slow
  - they understand more clearly what they are trying to achieve and are more independent in deciding how to achieve it
  - they have more opportunities to experience artists working at first-hand, to give them a better understanding of creative processes
- accelerating the pace of subject improvement by ensuring that:
  - monitoring focuses more sharply on the quality of students' learning
  - all staff with leadership roles contribute fully to subject development.

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 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