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Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Slonecki

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 10 and 11 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, 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 good.

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is good.

- During Key Stage 3, students make good progress in learning to work from direct observation and in handling materials such as paint and collage. They work carefully and make good use of sketchbooks to record each stage of their projects.
- Progress is good during Key Stage 4 and a high proportion of students achieve grades A* to C at GCSE. They respond thoughtfully to a range of starting points and many use the subject well to explore aspects of their lives, their identities and the world around them.

- Students work hard to develop their ideas with examples of highly individual outcomes. However, some students do not take enough creative risks in exploring processes, or refer to a wide enough range of work by other artists, to resolve their ideas successfully. In particular, more able students do not always achieve the level of refinement required to gain the highest GCSE grades.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Lesson activities are well-structured and teachers manage the use of practical materials and artefacts effectively. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards to show artists' work and stimulate learning.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and show good levels of commitment to the subject, reflecting their work as creative practitioners.
- Lessons have a calm atmosphere with regular whole-class discussions contributing much to students' engagement in learning, for example in assessing each other's work. Students' positive attitudes and good social skills add greatly to the value of these discussions.
- Students' progress over time is monitored well. Good use is made of this information to provide challenge and support in most lessons, including through teachers' individual discussions with students. However, some opportunities are missed, notably in Key Stage 3, to adapt teaching to meet students' individual needs and encourage them to think critically for themselves about how to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum supports good development of students' observational skills in recording, analysing and selecting from visual reference.
- Learning experiences develop in a logical sequence with particular strengths in two-dimensional work. Students encounter a good variety of themes and starting points which sustain their interest.
- There are limitations in the breadth of students' experiences with too few opportunities to work in three-dimensions or use digital technology. Whole-school initiatives at Key Stage 3, associated with the school's specialist status for media arts, are starting to fill these gaps but need to go further to ensure experiences for students are comprehensive.
- Regular reference to the work of other creative practitioners ensures students understand well the value of other's work in supporting their own creativity. The range of references is satisfactory, although there is too little exposure to contemporary visual practice or artists at work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- Subject leadership is effective in developing provision and students' outcomes, for example, increasing the proportion of girls gaining a good grade at GCSE over recent years.
- Subject monitoring is largely accurate through reference to assessment information, work scrutiny and lesson observation. The outcomes are used well to check that all groups of students make good progress and to highlight areas which could be better, such as making sure that the more able students consistently achieve their goals. Monitoring is less effective in ensuring comprehensive curriculum breadth.
- Development planning has improved in the last year with targets for improvement and steps to achieve them now defined more sharply.
- Subject teachers work well together to develop provision and share ideas so that students' experiences are consistent.

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

This aspect is satisfactory.

- Students make good progress in drawing from direct observation because it is a high priority for the department. They are given regular experience of observational work so their observational drawing in a range of materials, including mixed-media, is good.
- Their opportunities to use the memory and the imagination as starting points for drawing, or to explore how artists have worked this way, are less comprehensive. As a result, their progress in exploring their own creative ideas through these approaches to drawing is more limited.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring all lessons take full account of students' differing needs and encourage them to think independently about how to move on
- broadening the curriculum by:
 - giving students more opportunities to work in three-dimensions and to use digital technology
 - exposing them to a wider range of creative practice, including first-hand experience of contemporary practitioners at work
 - ensuring they have more opportunities to develop their confidence in using a wider range of approaches to drawing.

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