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Ms C Shaw
Principal
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Dear Ms Shaw

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit, with Janet Mercer HMI, on 17 and 18 November 2009 to look at work in citizenship and art, craft and design.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of each subject, the focus in citizenship was on students' political understanding and, in art, craft and design, the focus was 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 with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, and observations of lessons.

Citizenship

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be good.

Achievement in citizenship

Achievement in citizenship is good.

- Standards in citizenship are satisfactory and students made good progress in lessons observed, and over time, as shown by the school's monitoring data.

- Students enjoy citizenship and take an active part in discussion; they generally work well together in groups, contributing their ideas and listening to those of others.
- Although knowledge, understanding and skills are patchy, there are areas of strength, such as students' understanding of democracy, an area of learning that is reinforced through the course. For example, Year 9 students were able to explain democracy in the UK, comparing it with the system in Zimbabwe.
- Written assignments show satisfactory standards in critical thinking and enquiry, for example using evidence to address questions linked to crime and voting.
- The evidence was stronger on acquisition of knowledge and understanding of concepts than on processes of advocacy and representation and participation and responsible action. However, a good example was seen in a Year 10 lesson where girls considered how to influence the school's anti-discrimination policy.
- Outside the main curriculum, some students achieve high standards in representation and responsible action, for example through the wide-ranging work of the significant number of peer mentors and through involvement in debating.
- Students enjoy citizenship and recognise its components in anthropology and in tutor time, where they particularly value opportunities for discussion and the exploration of topical issues.
- Students are given opportunities to offer their views on the work of the directorate through the student steering groups and, more widely, through the school council. The council is developing a stronger presence in the school on the basis of thorough evaluation. Students know that their voice is heard.
- Evidence suggested that citizenship provision is inclusive and that students from different groups are involved in all aspects of work within and beyond the curriculum. Personal development is very good.

Quality of citizenship teaching

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teaching is characterised by good relationships with students, thorough planning that pays attention to the needs of individuals, and a good range of resources. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well for teaching.
- A range of teaching styles helps to motivate students. Strategies used to tackle any misbehaviour are generally effective.
- A sixth-form lesson was outstanding in the painstaking attention to students' understanding of complex material, with students contributing well to a tutorial approach.

- Teachers mark students work very thoroughly and include comments on strengths and pointers for improvement.
- Periodic end-of-module assessments provide a formal record of individual progress and good evidence for the evaluation of teaching.
- However, the tasks set for these assignments and/or the lack of explicit criteria mean that they do not yet provide a true measure of students' attainment.

Quality of the citizenship curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- A strong citizenship curriculum has been developed in a short space of time and is evolving in the light of experience. The core programme of modules in anthropology focuses on the key concepts of citizenship in both Key Stages 3 and 4. This is supplemented by the complementary work undertaken within the tutorial programme, based on the 'anthropology calendar'. Assemblies are also coordinated with this programme and involve students in activities such as raising funds for charities.
- Additionally, contributions to citizenship from other subjects have been audited and periodic days, when the timetable is suspended, enable work in depth on particular areas.
- The focus in the scheme of work is on the concepts and range of study, with less attention given to progressive development of the processes of critical thinking and enquiry, advocacy and representation and taking informed action. Although, for example, a specific activity on pressure groups and campaigning is planned, this element could be introduced more widely into other elements of the curriculum.
- Although there are separate schemes of work for Key Stage 3 and 4, at present, they do not sufficiently show progression across the key stages.
- Opportunities are taken to build on students' experience of citizenship in the sixth form.
- Work on citizenship is also complemented by other aspects of the school's work, such as school linking.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are outstanding.

- Senior leaders have recognised the potential of citizenship and have been supportive in terms of staffing, the curriculum and resources. This has enabled the development of a strong programme within the anthropology directorate and more broadly in the life of the school. More could be made of achievements in citizenship in key documents, for example the prospectus and the Anthropology Standards Review.

- Subject leadership of citizenship is very effective, combining enthusiasm, up-to-date knowledge of developments in citizenship and rigorous monitoring to take the subject forward.
- The citizenship curriculum is well thought out and the subject leader has identified what needs to be done to take it forward.
- The complex task of coordinating the core anthropology programme and the tutorial programme has been managed well, with objective evaluation revealing weaknesses that have been targeted for improvement.
- The audit of citizenship across the school is thorough and informative and discussion with subject heads of department has raised the profile of the subject.
- Arrangements for assessment are good and sit within the anthropology directorate's monitoring system.
- The 'academy voice' self-evaluation has contributed to a very thorough evaluation of the work of the school council.
- Citizenship makes a good contribution to the promotion of community cohesion and a project is in place to develop this further by involving students in work on conflict resolution.

Subject issue: students' political understanding

Students' political understanding is satisfactory overall and good in some respects.

- Teaching about democracy is well provided for in the curriculum and students are familiar with the principles of democracy and can compare it with other systems.
- Students in Year 9 complete an assignment on voting and its importance. Currently, this has a strong historical perspective which, while valid, may detract from the main focus of the task.
- Students understood the work of pressure groups. They were less confident on the role of political parties and aspects of the working of government.
- Sixth-form students studying politics within A-level sociology showed that they had made very good progress in developing their political understanding.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- giving more attention to advocacy and representation, participation and action as an integral part of the core and tutorial programmes
- building the schemes of work to show progression from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4
- ensuring that assessment tasks are clearly focused and supported with criteria that are shared with students.

Art, craft and design

The overall effectiveness of art, craft and design is good with outstanding features.

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is good.

- The school's well thought out baseline tests in Year 7 indicate that students' starting points are low. Boys and girls, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress. Current monitoring data indicate that the majority of students are on course to achieve or exceed their targets in the subject by the end of Year 9. However, a very small minority of students are achieving below their target level.
- In 2009, a small number of students took national examinations in Year 11 and Year 12. Several students on the BTEC first diploma course in Year 11 attained higher grades than predicted, with five students achieving merit grades and two achieving distinction grades. Those who took AS-level art achieved in line with, or better than, predictions but, while all achieved their qualification, none achieved the higher grades.
- Overall, good standards are attained. Students are confident working in a wide range of media, exploring two- and three-dimensional materials and techniques, including some less familiar materials, such as making sculptures from willow.
- Students use sketchbooks effectively, annotating working processes and reviewing and evaluating their own work. They analyse and investigate the work of other artists successfully as a starting point for their work. This often includes the work of less well-known artists from the past and the contemporary world.
- Students value opportunities the subject provides to express themselves and explore their identity, which enhances their self-esteem and boosts their confidence. As a result, many older students say they are keen to progress to the sixth form or to higher education when, a few years ago, they would not have thought this possible.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Staff are enthusiastic and demonstrate good subject knowledge. Excellent relationships with students contribute to a lively and productive learning environment. Teachers know their students very well, and plan lessons carefully to take account of their different abilities, interests and learning needs. The focus on achievement is evident in the close alignment

between schemes of work and assessment criteria, but this is less well-developed in the sixth form.

- Projects and activities are varied; there is a range of interesting work promoting students' enjoyment and commitment. Teachers use stimulating visual resources and encourage an open and experimental approach. They help students overcome any fear of failure by emphasising the importance of the creative process.
- Teachers ensure that students understand the relevant assessment criteria and how to achieve their targets. Progress is monitored closely and students receive good verbal and written feedback on what has gone well and how to improve. Students at risk of underachieving are identified and supported promptly.
- Teachers make frequent use of ICT to share lesson objectives and show examples of work. However, students have insufficient access to computers in art studios to use digital media creatively in the development of their own work.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum is planned well to meet students' needs. In Year 7, a strong focus on developing subject skills is followed by opportunities to apply these through drawing and themed project work.
- The school has developed a highly creative approach to the curriculum at Key Stage 3, with a strong emphasis on cross-curricular working across all arts subjects. Students appreciate the opportunity to choose the medium in which they work, and the exhibition and performance of students' work at the end of each term recognise and celebrate their achievement.
- The revised curriculum for Key Stage 4 has had a positive impact on raising standards and achievement and in increasing the numbers of students taking art in Year 10 and 11. In 2009, only nine students took the BTEC course, but over 50 current Year 10 students are studying art and design.
- The AS and A-level course is providing appropriate progression routes for the small number of students currently studying art in the sixth form. The school is aware of the importance of keeping the range of provision under review to meet the needs of the large cohort taking vocational qualifications in Year 11.
- While courses in all years provide students with a good variety of different ways of working, the majority of projects are biased towards fine art with few opportunities to fully explore craft, design and digital media.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- Subject leaders have been successful in raising students' achievement in the arts, through ensuring a consistently good standard of teaching and developing the curriculum to meet students' needs.
- The school has built a very enthusiastic teaching team who share a strong commitment to the transformational possibilities of the subject. The focus on raising aspiration, achievement and self-confidence is consistent owing to the impact of clear and visionary subject leadership.
- Managers have promoted an innovative approach to developing high quality and creative cross-curricular projects across arts subjects. This has created a strong team ethos, where staff are willing to take risks, try new ideas and learn with, and from, each other. Now that these cross-curricular approaches have proved successful within the arts directorate, the team is keen to extend collaboration with other subject areas.
- The involvement of students acting as 'arts champions' in promoting the subject contributes well to the development of art, craft and design. The Artsweek in 2009 celebrated the creative achievements of students through exhibitions, theatre and music performance and media work. Teachers shared good practice in arts teaching with other subjects. The school has recently applied for the Artsmark award. Senior leaders are keen to establish a second specialism in the arts and the directorate is well placed to respond to this challenge.

Subject issue: The development of students' confidence and creativity through drawing is good.

- A well-structured approach to teaching drawing from Year 7 enables students to develop the necessary skills to use drawing as a means of visual recording and research, as well as a form of expression, experimentation and invention. Students develop a good understanding of formal elements and how to apply these in their work. Drawing is developed through a wide range of media, including printmaking, collage, and three-dimensional media. Students' progress and standards are good.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the proportion of higher grades achieved by sixth-form students by:
 - strengthening the scheme of work with more precise objectives, directly linked to assessment criteria and higher grade descriptors
 - developing the range of options to meet the needs of all students
- increasing the use of ICT as a creative medium in art, craft and design by:
 - building opportunities for digital work into schemes of work
 - providing ready access to appropriate equipment and software
 - increasing links with the creative industries that use ICT

- ensuring the curriculum provides sufficient opportunities for students to explore craft and design work.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop these subjects in the school.

A copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website and made available to inspectors of your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Scott Harrison
Additional Inspector