

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



16 November 2009

Mr K Nimmo
Headteacher
John Willmott School
Reddicap Heath Road
Sutton Coldfield
West Midlands
B75 7DY

Dear Mr Nimmo

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit, with Janet Mercer HMI, on 3 and 4 November 2009 to look at 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 with confidence and creativity.

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 with students and staff, scrutiny of documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the subject is satisfactory with good features.

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement is satisfactory overall, but recent examination results were good.

- In Years 7 to 9, boys and girls make satisfactory progress in the subject attaining standards similar to those achieved nationally. The students who took an examination in 2009 made good progress in Years 10 and 11 attaining above-average standards, an improvement on previous years. Sixth formers progress consistently well, many attaining high grades in the 'applied' course.

- Students' current work in Year 7 shows competent observation and drawing skills. Year 8 and 9 work includes good responses to particular projects, for example magazine collaged portraits. However, progress is inconsistent overall, particularly in Year 8 where students appeared less committed. A Year 9 group of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities showed what is possible when inspired by teaching and subject matter directly relevant to them.
- Students continuously revisit skills and subject matter such as drawing and personal identity. This promotes confident work, on an ambitious scale that is connected well to the work of other artists. Despite a wide range of art media encountered, students' limited first-hand experiences restrict their understanding about how the subject can be applied.
- Students in all years value the opportunities provided to express personal feelings or insights through the subject. Not all students learn quickly the sensitivity required when criticising art created by their peers. However, some sixth formers communicate their conviction convincingly and criticism expertly.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- The students benefit from teachers' good subject knowledge and expertise, used most effectively when working to their strengths with examination groups. Examples of work by relevant artists, other students or their own, make expectations clear. Students are guided well, making challenging work accessible.
- Staff use opportunities to extend students' specialist vocabulary in lessons. However, written feedback to students is variable and students' actions are not always followed through in subsequent assessment. Marking is regular but the impact on students' progress is patchy. In some lessons, teacher talk dominates, limiting opportunities for students to reflect and resolve problems independently and practically. Teaching is most effective when intervention is used judiciously.
- Lessons involve a series of clearly linked activities, creating a purposeful pace. The most effective engage students from the start, for example by providing a task to complete while watching a video. Occasionally, not enough notice is taken of their responses to ensure that attention is total or unexpected ideas are exploited.
- Students value the environment created by a team of teaching and support staff who work well together. A good proportion of students enjoy the dynamic of working with several staff but this is less of a feature in Years 7 to 9. The art rooms are alive with students' work but the large scale restricts the use of space.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Examination options include GCSE, BTEC, and A level, enabling students to follow a broad course or pursue specialist areas, most commonly photography. Course structures enable students to meet objectives. The Key Stage 3 course includes, for example, understanding contemporary art and tackling drawing confidently. However, overall it promotes insufficient continuity with students' prior experience or progression across years and subjects. For example, there are missed opportunities to link students' issues-based work in the subject to themes explored in their 'guidance' lessons.
- The recently introduced suspended timetable days are popular with all years. In Year 10, a visiting artist-in-residence working with students throughout a school day enabled them to learn unfamiliar techniques and boost their achievement. However, not all students have worked with a living artist. The role of sixth formers as an inspiration to others is an underused resource.
- Sixth-form students make effective use of gallery visits, including a residential visit, usually to Barcelona. The curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4 makes insufficient reference to, or use of, art galleries and museums, particularly to increase students' awareness of local resources in Birmingham and Walsall.
- The range of two- and three-dimensional and digital media encountered by students is a strength of the curriculum. The breadth of artists, craftworkers and designers referenced from history and in the contemporary world is also wide. However, projects could be linked to a wider range of purposes including digitally related work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- Senior and middle leaders with oversight of the subject have worked effectively together to arrest a decline in standards at GCSE. The factors that improved results in 2009 were: a comprehensive and accurate faculty review; an evaluation of work in other schools using different examinations/boards; and systematic monitoring of students' performance to target intervention strategies.
- Roles and responsibilities within the department are explicit, with specialisation leading to clear accountability. Working within an arts faculty is beginning to increase collaboration but wider work across the school, embracing technology-specialist status or the new Key Stage 3 curriculum, is at an early stage.
- Improvement-planning priorities in the subject are now sharply focused on students' achievement in response to whole-school feedback when

inspected in January. However, the emphasis on personal development is a strength of departmental documentation and ethos which could be articulated more widely.

- Good capacity to improve is indicated by: sustained success in the sixth form; higher grades at GCSE through tackling borderline performance; and consistently good teaching of subject skills, for example drawing. Nevertheless, more could be made of Key Stage 3 to increase participation and higher-grade performance.

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

- Drawing is taught well and regularly. The early emphasis on mark-making and drawing from observation is complemented by the use of different media, tools and techniques. Links made to different artists' approaches to drawing are explicit. Students develop their drawing progressively but could be challenged earlier on by tasks aimed at extending and applying their learning outside the classroom.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 by:
 - increasing students' first-hand experiences
 - ensuring that planning promotes progression across the key stage
 - evaluating students' responses to promote and sustain their interest
- increasing the profile of the subject across the school by:
 - exhibiting more work in public areas of the school and in the local community
 - connecting schemes of work to students' other subjects and skills
 - strengthening links with technology in school and creative industries outside.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector