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Mrs H Reeves
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Dear Mrs Reeves

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 and 18 September 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 the impact of the new secondary curriculum on students' ability to 'think and act like artists, craftworkers and designers, working creatively and intelligently'.

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 made included: interviews with you, the subject leader, students in Key Stage 3 and 4, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of five 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.

- In Years 7 to 9, students make satisfactory progress. Many start with limited confidence in their use of different media. However, they respond well to opportunities to express their ideas and imagination visually.

- In Years 7 and 8, an early focus on drawing skills ensures good progress in students' use of line and tone to capture observations. Their painting skills remain basic, limited by insufficient experimentation with surface texture or exploration of colour.
- Students value opportunities to learn how to compare and contrast the work of other artists, craftworkers and designers to stimulate their own creativity. Their range of three-dimensional forms shows that students in Year 8 understand how to interpret the work of others.
- The proportion of students who choose to take an examination in the subject is high. Generally students, including the high proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress and achieve grades similar to those achieved nationally. The proportion achieving grade A or above at GCSE is below the national average but 2009 results demonstrate an improving trend.
- In Years 10 and 11, students use their sketchbooks effectively to refine their ideas and pursue ways of communicating their feelings and emotions. In the best work, the students' depth of thinking is reflected in sophisticated use of techniques, for example photography.
- In all years, students enjoy the subject and work purposefully. They are reflective about their own work and respectful about work created by others. They articulate their understanding of creativity well and appreciate opportunities to build on their achievements outside school. For example, Year 9 and 10 students were involved in the development of a 'Creative Manifesto' at Tate Modern.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teachers are knowledgeable but consider students' needs thoughtfully when planning to share their expertise. They enable students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to explore challenging concepts. While starting points are the same for all students in a group, personalised follow-up and sharing different responses are strengths.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used selectively and effectively by teachers. Limited text and well chosen images make objectives clear and attainable. Annotated displays of students' work illustrate teacher expectations but are generally confined to GCSE classes.
- The use of assessment to promote students' progress is clearly evident where teachers' written comments are stored sequentially in sketchbooks. Student's evaluations, written alongside, reflect their understanding and are generally well focused on those skills that the lesson or project specifically aimed to develop.
- Teachers demonstrate confidently without prescribing students' responses. While more students could actively contribute to demonstration, their

views are welcomed positively through discussion. In the best lessons, the teacher specifically involved the more passive students, girls in particular.

- The teachers assume ownership of their schemes of work, each taking responsibility for lesson planning within a well conceived whole-school format. They are confident about adapting planning by evaluating students' responses.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- A new subject curriculum in Years 7 and 8 is at an early stage of implementation. While it is too soon to evaluate the impact, the early introduction of topics such as 'prejudice' prepares students well for later study. However, planned progression of skills, knowledge and understanding unique to the subject is an area for further development.
- The opportunities for students to manage extended tasks and work collaboratively in cross-curricular contexts including 'intensive weeks' are a strength of curriculum provision. Students studying an examination in the subject also value blocks of consecutive lessons which enable them to develop, apply and sustain skills.
- Students who choose to pursue art, craft or design-related accreditation have a wide range of options. These include the Arts Council Arts Award, unendorsed and endorsed GCSE options, BTEC, and the Creative and Media Diploma. Students are given adequate guidance about the opportunities available locally for pursuing the subject post-16. Their awareness about how the subject contributes to personal development is a strength.
- Not all students work with a practising artist or visit an art gallery as part of their entitlement in Key Stage 3. However, students' first hand experience of original work has a very positive impact in Key Stage 4. For example, local resources such as the Ikon gallery and Walsall gallery are used effectively. BTEC students were motivated by a 'live' project focusing on the restoration of the Victorian baths in Moseley.
- The multicultural dimension of the school is embraced through the art, craft and design curriculum. The topic focused on 'I, Me, Mine' exemplifies the explicit opportunities to explore identity. Links to artists and art movements from the past are less explicit. While the curriculum promotes good analysis of why other artists' work exists, more emphasis could be given to the methods used by different artists.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- Senior leaders have used their own specialist experience of teaching and leading the arts to ensure that the school's arts specialism has a lasting

impact on students' achievement and personal and creative development. This contributes to the effectiveness of the subject. Staff make judicious innovations and teach creatively. The students are keen to study the subject and are confident to develop and express their unique qualities.

- Subject self-evaluation is accurate and well informed by good practice in other schools. Priorities for improvement provide an appropriate basis for further improvement.
- The recently appointed subject leader has communicated her ambition for the subject clearly and visually. There is further potential for sharing her perceptive views and supportive actions to help drive further improvement.
- The accommodation for the subject restricts the development of large scale or whole-group work. Not all lessons use specialist art rooms. While display is used appropriately and resources are managed efficiently by teachers, the space affords little opportunity to promote student's movement and independent management of resources. An exception is the ICT suite which is accessible and well equipped.
- The visit coincided with the introduction of changes in leadership in the visual and performing arts and in the roles of senior leaders. The track record of collaborative work between subjects and art forms, and supportive but challenging relationships between senior and middle leaders, indicate good capacity for continued improvement that will have an impact within the school and the wider community.

Subject issue:

The impact of the new secondary curriculum on students' ability to 'think and act like artists, craftworkers and designers, working creatively and intelligently' is good.

- While the new subject curriculum is at an early stage of development, students' awareness of personal, learning and thinking skills is well established. Students demonstrate a clear understanding about working creatively and intelligently in the subject.
- Sketchbooks are well developed in Years 10 and 11 but have further potential in Years 7 to 9 to draw together students' prior and wider experiences, including opportunities to learn about artists, craftworkers and designers through workshops or visits to galleries.

Strengths, which we discussed, included:

- the school's specialism in performing and visual arts, and selection nationally as a school of creativity, which provides a stimulating context for teachers and students to thrive in the subject
- the popularity of the subject with students, and their success in achieving accreditation in an aspect of the subject which capitalises on their interests and aspirations

- the development of students' understanding about abstract concepts which enables students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to express personal ideas and feelings through the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- enabling more students to achieve the highest examination grades by establishing a foundation of skills development in Years 7 and 8 to complement their development of sophisticated ideas
- ensuring that students in all years learn how to make connections between their own work and that of practising artists, craftworkers and designers, including how to use different media
- encouraging students to draw on their prior experiences, those enjoyed outside school and in the context of other subjects by using sketchbooks as journals and sourcebooks.

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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector