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Dear Mr Lloyd

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 1 and 2 December 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 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with students and staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is outstanding.

- Students' attainment in GCSE has been well above average for several years. As many students join with below average attainment in art and low literacy skills, this represents excellent progress. While boys' attainment is well below that of girls at the end of Year 8, this is rectified by the end of year 11, when the proportion of students achieving A* to C in art and design is well above average for both groups.

- Sixth form students achieve well. A high proportion of students achieved A to C grades in AS-level art, graphic design and photography. However, in 2009, this proportion declined to below average on A-level art courses. Nevertheless, sixth-form work shows a high level of independent thinking and reflection.
- Students are committed to the subject and speak openly of their enjoyment. Many attend art clubs to continue after school. Students' work strongly reflects their personal interests and ideas, resulting in very diverse responses to set themes at GCSE, and their own choice of subject matter in the sixth form.
- Students use a wide range of materials and techniques, working confidently on a large scale, in two and three dimensions. Access to computers in the art studios enables regular use of digital media and skilful use of specialist software.
- High-quality visual research through drawing and reference to the work of artists or designers underpins all project work. Students use sketchbooks effectively, annotating working processes and critically evaluating their work. However, for some students, low literacy skills limit the quality of written annotation and evaluation.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design is outstanding.

- Consistently high-quality teaching motivates students, supporting high levels of achievement. Students are able to clearly identify the skills they have learned and value the support and encouragement provided. Extensive displays of work in art rooms and around the school are a source of pride and inspiration.
- Teachers plan interesting, challenging tasks for students. Clear learning objectives are shared with students, and stimulating visual resources inspire students. Teachers frequently make excellent use of students' work as exemplars. Presentation and demonstration of their work enable students to learn from each other and develop their self-confidence and communication skills.
- Teachers are skilled in drawing out students' responses, reinforcing their understanding, encouraging them to think for themselves and develop their own solutions to visual problems. The strong focus on developing students' reflective and critical skills supports their understanding of how to improve.
- Teachers provide well-targeted support for less able students and ensure more able students are given more challenging work to stretch them. Students know their targets and value teachers' praise and constructive critical feedback.
- Lessons have a calm and purposeful atmosphere. The brisk pace and varied activities keep students engaged, although, especially for older

students, one-hour lessons limit how far they can develop their work and ideas in class.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The school provides excellent opportunities for all students to experience art, design and craft-based work. Courses in graphic design and photography have increased boys' participation at Key Stage 4 and 5.
- Drawing skills are taught well from Year 7, with design, three-dimensional craft and digital media introduced in Year 8. Taster activities broaden students' experiences in Year 8 to support informed decisions about option choices.
- A small number of students identified as vulnerable, or with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are supported well through targeted sessions in art, photography and animation. The school is introducing the use of Arts Awards to recognise an even wider range of achievement and is considering the re-introduction of an applied course to meet the needs of those for whom GCSE may not be appropriate.
- Students have regular opportunities to work with creative practitioners and visit exhibitions or studios, though this is less well developed for Years 7 and 8. Sixth-form students benefit from residential experiences, most recently in Paris. Highly effective partnership working with the University of the Arts, London, supports students' practical work and raises aspirations. Students' involvement with weekend and summer schools and portfolio-preparation days supports high levels of progression to higher education.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- The enthusiastic art team share a clear vision of how art can open minds and raise aspiration and achievement. Students' personal development is considered as important as academic achievement. The very strong focus on inclusion and individual achievement makes a significant contribution to the department's high examination success and high quality of work achieved by students.
- The team promotes the subject very well throughout the school and wider community, including extensive use of display. Sixth-form students are excellent ambassadors for the subject. They provide support for younger students in lessons, after-school clubs and arts events.
- Wide-ranging partnerships with local schools, universities, galleries and practising artists extend and enhance students' experiences. The school has recently applied for the Artsmark award to acknowledge their work in the school and wider community. The department is leading some

innovative, cross-curricular work with the expressive arts subjects and other subject areas, sharing good practice through a creative approach to teaching and learning.

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

- Students of all ages are aware of a variety of approaches and purposes in drawing. They understand the need for observational skills and how this extends their abilities in the subject, but are also aware of how drawing can be more expressive of emotions and ideas, how it can convey meaning and be used to create, invent and improvise.
- All projects contain some element of drawing, with a clear focus on observed drawing and working from artists' work. Students' work is often more confident when working from secondary sources, than at first-hand. Opportunities for students to develop more imaginative or expressive approaches to drawing are less well developed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- Raising boys' achievement at Key Stage 3 by:
 - extending opportunities for students to choose to work in two or three dimensions, and explore craft, design and digital media
 - increasing students' first-hand experiences through visits or workshops
- Supporting students to achieve higher grades at GCSE, AS and A-level by:
 - developing their ability to annotate and evaluate their work critically, using subject-specific vocabulary confidently
 - widening opportunities for students to explore different approaches to drawing so they develop confidence in analytical and imaginative work
 - providing more regular opportunities for extended working to enable students to fully develop their ideas and practical work

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

Janet Mercer
Her Majesty's Inspector