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Mr A Morris  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Morris

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 9 and 10 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 how 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included discussions with staff and students from Key Stages 2 and 3, observations of teaching and learning in Key Stage 3, scrutiny of relevant documents and students' work in sketchbooks and portfolios.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Students' achievement in art, craft and design is good.

- Students make good progress in acquiring subject skills, knowledge and understanding. However, their achievement, while good, is constrained by the impact of curriculum planning that does not take sufficient account of students' attainment on entry to the school. Secure systems for assessment ensure that the end-of-year data on attainment are accurate.

- Standards in Key Stage 2 are broadly average by the end of Year 6. The school's data for 2008/09 indicate that a significant majority of the students who reached national expectations were girls. The school has rightly identified boys' achievement as a priority for improvement.
- There is clear evidence to support the school's view that students in Key Stage 3 make at least good progress. By the end of Year 9, almost all students reach national averages and some achieve above expectations. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment narrows, although in 2008/09 three times more girls than boys achieved the higher Levels 6 and 7.
- In lessons, a range of factors contributes to students' good learning. Expectations of productivity are high; students' behaviour is exemplary; lessons are organised extremely well and are suitably structured. Students know what they are expected to achieve and rise to the challenge with enthusiasm. They know what their targets are and how to reach them.
- Older students begin to produce more diverse outcomes in response to similar starting points because they are given more autonomy to determine the direction their work should take.
- The curriculum promotes students' skills in using techniques and processes with care and attention to detail. But weaknesses stem from limited opportunities for students to raise their creative expectations and develop creative attributes through gallery visits, dialogue with artists or working collaboratively on a large scale.
- Students confidently and sensitively express their opinions about their own and others' work.

#### Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Relationships between staff and students are extremely good and as a result, students are responsive, attentive and confident learners.
- Students receive helpful, constructive support and guidance during lessons.
- Planning is detailed and lessons run smoothly. The needs of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are considered thoughtfully so that they receive additional support to secure success. During Key Stage 3, there are opportunities for the most able students to learn together through challenging tasks.
- Students are introduced to key words to use in discussing their work, although teaching does not always sufficiently insist that they do so.
- Students have wide access to information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning and research so that they develop excellent skills, confidence and expertise in using them. This is mirrored in teaching.
- The school has developed a secure scheme of work that systematically introduces students to a wide range of techniques, processes and opportunities for them to revisit and refine their ideas. Students work

closely to their brief in lessons but their work rarely takes an unexpected direction. As a consequence, outcomes are not always original and diverse.

- Students are actively encouraged to self-evaluate their success and convey their ideas confidently because they are specifically taught how to.

### Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The impact that the art and design curriculum has on students' learning and enjoyment is immediately obvious in lessons. Art and craftwork depicting an extensive range of methods, processes and techniques are displayed with precision and care in classrooms and communal areas.
- The department is developing good links with other subjects. This is particularly evident in lessons where students engage in activities that require application of both literacy and art skills.
- The curriculum exceeds requirements in providing opportunities for students to learn new skills and to develop, deepen and apply existing skills.
- Art club runs periodically during the year to enable some students to engage in creative pursuits beyond the school day.
- Enrichment days enable students to immerse themselves in the subject for longer periods of time. They speak highly of these events.
- Students make gains in their knowledge of different artists, designers and craft-workers through well-chosen units of work. However, the unique skills and experiences of living artists are rarely employed, limiting students' awareness of how creativity applies to the world of work.
- Students of all abilities are supported well by the curriculum. Those with special gifts and talents are identified and occasionally benefit from enrichment days provided by the transfer school.
- Occasional visits, for example to the Victoria and Albert Museum, provide opportunities for students to broaden their experiences in the subject still further. However, the curriculum does not capitalise on local resources.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

The effectiveness of leadership and management is good.

- The school's leadership and management are ambitious for improvement and use data sources effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses. Senior leaders are proud of the school's achievements in the subject and keen to develop it further and achieve outstanding practice.
- Monitoring and evaluation are rigorous and systematic. Students' work is sampled regularly for evidence that the department's work is leading to

improvements. This ensures that the department achieves its aims in the annual department action plan.

- Systems for performance management are effective with negotiated targets for improvement.
- The subject is managed under the umbrella of art, design and technology. There are very few staff working specifically in art, craft and design. This is managed particularly well ensuring that they are supported well and have opportunities for discussion and moderation with parallel staff in other local schools.
- Regular observations of teaching and learning ensure that the head of art, design and technology has an accurate view of the quality and effectiveness of provision.
- The conscientious and diligent efforts of teaching staff, supported by effective leadership and management, provide a firm foundation for future improvement. The improved performance of boys is indicative of the school's good capacity to sustain improvement.

Subject issue: how effectively students are learning to draw confidently and creatively

Students' learning about how to draw with confidence and creativity is good.

- Students draw regularly and readily, often using their sketchbooks to trial ideas and plan for future work. Teachers add extremely encouraging comments balanced with expressions of thoughtful criticism to guide students towards the highest standards they can achieve.
- Progress in students' drawing is good or better. Students have regular opportunities to use a range of drawing tools.
- The school is providing more opportunities for boys to choose their subjects for drawing. This increases the level of their engagement and enjoyment. Many boys commented that they enjoyed opportunities to draw.
- Opportunities to work on a large scale are too limited.
- Students are able to review, refine and modify their drawing through good guidance in teaching and criteria against which they can judge success.
- Portfolios of prior students' work provide useful reference sources for students. Through their use, students are developing an understanding of what an exemplary, good, moderate or weak drawing looks like.

Examples of good practice

- The excellent personal skills and qualities that students develop in the subject through high expectations for productive learning and frequent opportunities to reflect on their own and others' work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- enriching the curriculum to extend students' experiences by:
  - increasing opportunities for them to engage with contemporary art, craft and design, including work with creative practitioners
  - making more frequent visits to studios, workshops and galleries
- raising the achievement of students in Year 6 by:
  - gathering information about students' prior and baseline attainment
  - promoting more diverse outcomes by adapting the curriculum and teaching in relation to students' varied starting points
  - providing more opportunities for students to steer the direction of their work and capitalise on the unexpected.

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

Linda Killman  
Her Majesty's Inspector