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8 March 2010

Sir John Edwards
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Dear Sir John

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 24 and 25 February 2010 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 staff and groups of students in each key stage; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of nine lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

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

- In Years 7 and 8, students make satisfactory progress in developing subject skills, knowledge and understanding. They develop confidence in the use of graphic media, evident in their imaginative and intricate work in response to the 'mechanical me' theme. Their use of sketchbooks to record continuous experience, observation and enquiry is underdeveloped.
- The proportion of students who choose to follow a GCSE course in the subject from Year 9 is average. They make satisfactory progress on the

GCSE course, attaining standards similar to the national picture but lower than their other subjects. While a small proportion attained A* or A grades in 2009, students' current work, for example Year 10 work inspired by natural forms and explicitly linked to artists, indicates higher standards.

- The BTEC art and design option is proving popular. Some effective mixed-media work achieved in Year 9 shows that, when guided, skills are applied well. Year 10 work designed for a restaurant also shows that students' progress accelerates when responding to a brief. However, the students taking examinations in the subject do not always show they can revisit and refine ideas or techniques independently, limiting the depth of some work.
- In the sixth form, taking account of AS, A-level and BTEC courses, past results and current work, students make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points. Attainment is best where students are inspired to use media skilfully to express personal insights and feelings. The BTEC work shows the value of integrating digital media. However, quality is sometimes constrained by superficial connections to other artists' work.
- In all years, students enjoy the practical aspects of lessons, often opting for the subject as a complement to their academic studies. However, progress is sometimes slowed by teacher dependence rather than student-driven learning, constrained by lack of direct experience of the passion, creativity and occasional controversy connected with other artists' work.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall because the impact on students' achievement, particularly those with higher ability, is average in relation to their starting points. However, during the visit, the majority of teaching observed was good or better. Students progressed well in lessons that challenged their observation skills immediately, linked objectives to art-specific vocabulary, and maintained a brisk pace through a sequence of activities. The varied teaching skills used by different staff indicate there is more to be gained by working collaboratively.
- There are already examples of shared assessment approaches that give students an equal opportunity to succeed through positive, critical and specific feedback. For example, the examination course booklets include comments that are closely related to objectives required for success. Peer-assessment is beginning to capitalise on the positive and supportive attitudes that students bring to their lessons. A variable aspect is the use of information about individual students to pitch challenges or prepare tailored approaches that meet specific needs or interests.
- Consistently enthusiastic teaching has a positive impact on students' enjoyment of the subject. Of more variable quality is teaching that reveals the artist in the teacher, for example by demonstrating how to exhaust the creative potential of an idea or technique. The best lessons exploit visual and tactile communication and provide students with a distinctive route to

learning or challenge them to develop and demonstrate their personal qualities, including individuality and resilience, through the subject.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Revised schemes of work in all key stages aim to equip students with the subject skills, knowledge and understanding to attain standards and develop greater independence. While it is too early to evaluate the impact on students' progression, their current work shows promise. The intensive programme devised for Years 7 and 8 is appropriate in preparing students more effectively for the examination courses that start in Year 9.
- The BTEC course options successfully complement GCSE, AS and A-level provision, making the relevance of the subject for different groups of students explicit. Nevertheless, the distinctive features of courses or relevance of specific activities could be heightened, for example by strengthening the vocational element of courses with more 'live' projects, integration of digital media or interaction with creative practitioners.
- The creative aspirations of students are not generally well informed by first-hand experience. Not all students, including those taking an examination, know how to access the rich cultural opportunities nearby. The profound impact of a recent visit to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park by Year 10 students emphasises the importance of such provision.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- Senior leaders are strongly supportive of the potential contribution of the subject to the school, evident in the provision of an attractive on-site gallery space and the strategic actions taken to arrest the decline in students' achievement. A wide range of evidence informs subject self-evaluation, including external consultation. Links within school are established, for example through the teaching and learning group and the annual arts festival. However, sustained partnerships with wider art communities are underdeveloped, for example with galleries or artists. The subject has limited visual impact across the school or community.
- Swift action in response to a recent departmental review, the value given to constructive feedback by all staff observed, and the quality of current students' work, indicate good capacity to sustain recent improvements.
- The school is aware that the overall balance between students' enjoyment and achievement and teachers' individuality and effectiveness, is not yet right. The sharing of schemes of work that have underpinned higher standards shows how staff are supported. However, the responsibility of individual staff to make a specialist contribution for which they are accountable is an aspect of improvement planning, monitoring and evaluation that should be strengthened.

Subject issue: how effectively students learn to draw with confidence and creativity

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

- Students are introduced to a wide range of graphic media, tackling their variable confidence in drawing quickly when starting at the school. A good balance is achieved between experimental mark-making with observation and control. Effective work in mixed-media illustrates the value of teaching students how to review and revisit skills, the most effective teaching making direct links to continuity and change in other artists' drawing.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the proportion of students achieving the higher grades by:
 - developing the specialist expertise and responsibilities of staff
 - teaching students how to pursue the potential of ideas and techniques
 - using assessment information to pitch individual challenges
 - enabling more students to engage and aspire through direct experience

- increasing the impact of the subject across school and community by:
 - using the school gallery to exemplify quality and creativity
 - sustaining partnerships with art educators and creative practitioners
 - linking more projects to a context
 - promoting students' personal development through the arts award.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design in the school.

As I explained previously, 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 your next institutional inspection team.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector