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Dear Mrs Bourne

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, 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 pupils 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of nine lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Pupils' achievement in art, craft and design is outstanding.

- Lessons are characterised by pupils' great enjoyment and enthusiasm for learning. They respond particularly well when working from direct experience, using the subject as a vehicle to interpret their experiences and to develop their communication with others.
- Many pupils face significant challenges in manipulating materials and equipment but persevere in learning to control what they do. They are

highly successful in exploring, for example, the qualities of different types of paint or the possibilities offered by interactive plasma screens.

- Pupils make outstanding gains through the subject in their personal, social and physical development. Notably, they learn to take responsibility for decisions about what they do so that the work made is often very meaningful and a great source of pride.
- The school's specialist status for the performing arts makes an excellent impact on pupils' subject achievement. By giving learning a powerful context, such as preparing for a performance, the pupils are motivated to succeed. Opportunities to learn from other artists are often a key aspect of these projects and pupils take full advantage of this to support their own work.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Activities in lessons are planned carefully to meet pupils' varying needs in relation to their overall development and their attainment in the subject. Expectations of pupils are challenging in all lessons.
- Teamwork between staff is developed exceptionally well so that the quality of teaching provided by teachers and teaching assistants is consistently high.
- Staff think carefully, and work very hard, in preparing activities to capture and sustain pupils' engagement. Powerful multi-sensory tasks are used carefully to stimulate learning, including through use of interactive screens. Staff are creative in their teaching, for example trying new ways to encourage pupils to explore objects or participate in stories before making images based on these starting points.
- Classroom routines, such as systems for pupils to select activities, are often based on imagery and help pupils to understand that images can help bridge the communication barriers which many experience. The newly built classrooms are very well organised to enable pupils to access resources and to support learning through the display of work.
- The assessment of pupils' progress during lessons is regular and makes an excellent contribution to their overall learning. Through close individual support, staff are able to refine tasks to meet pupils' needs and help those with restricted physical control to make practical pieces. On a minority of occasions, some of the more able pupils do not receive sufficiently precise guidance about how to move their learning forward.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Pupils receive a rich range of experiences, reflecting the school's ambition to include them fully in creative learning. The curriculum is adapted well over time in response to its impact on pupils' achievement and enjoyment.

- Specialist status has made a profound impact on the subject curriculum by raising the profile of the creative arts as a whole. Through the projects undertaken, strong links are made between arts subjects and the curriculum more widely to reinforce pupils' learning. The curriculum reflects clearly the school's location and pupils' interests .
- There is wide coverage of art, craft and design, involving work on different scales in both two and three dimensions. Pupils experience an excellent variety of individual, small group and team tasks. Staff are ingenious and determined in finding ways to adapt projects to enable pupils to access learning opportunities and are not deflected by practical difficulties.
- Effective external partnerships, including with an international dimension, enrich the subject curriculum. Creative projects regularly involve work with other schools and visiting artists. Good use is made of other institutions to provide additional tuition, notably for some older pupils who attend sessions at a college of further education. However, communication with the college is not always good enough to ensure that the learning undertaken on each site builds on the progress made by pupils in the other.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

The leadership and management of art, craft and design are outstanding.

- The subject is a high priority for the school, alongside other arts subjects, because communication as a core aspect of subject learning is recognised as a vital area for the pupils. The recognition that pupils really enjoy their opportunities in the subject also supports the high status given to arts-based learning.
- Staff are encouraged to be creative in exploring varied approaches to teaching and learning. Celebration and sharing of success, alongside honest evaluation when things go less well, enables the subject to move forward and is at the heart of its outstanding overall effectiveness.
- Strategic priorities for the subject are closely aligned with those of the school as a whole, reflecting for example, moves to improve the assessment of pupils' progress in the secondary phases.
- The quality of teaching and the curriculum are monitored carefully, in tandem with that in the arts area as a whole. In most cases, this is highly effective in ensuring pupils' experiences are of consistently high quality. Nevertheless, some opportunities are missed to check that more able pupils are always provided with clear guidance for improvement in lessons.

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

Pupils' learning about how to draw with confidence and creativity is outstanding.

- Pupils make outstanding progress in learning to draw as a way to respond to the world around them. Many make outstanding progress in developing their mark-making skills to support their developing writing. They are provided with stimulating direct and/or imagined experiences to ensure their drawing is purposeful. Drawing is valued highly by the pupils and the staff and is a core element of their learning. Staff make every effort to ensure all pupils have opportunities to draw. Pupils' progress in drawing is monitored carefully because the school recognises that it is often a vital component in assessing their overall development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing further the impact of teaching on more able pupils by ensuring precise guidance for improvement is given during all practical activities
- improving the continuity of learning for pupils attending college sessions by ensuring college staff have all the information needed to build on pupils' achievement in school and school staff build on progress in college.

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 the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector