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Mr J White
Headteacher
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Dear Mr White

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 10 and 11 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 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 interviews, scrutiny of documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is satisfactory.

- From average attainment on entry, students make satisfactory progress during Key Stages 3 and 4 to achieve levels of attainment in line with the national average. Students taking the BTEC course in Key Stage 4 make good progress and their attainment is above that seen nationally.
- Both boys and girls enjoy the subject, behaving well during lessons and approaching their learning with positive attitudes.

- Students progress well in exploring the properties of materials and learning to handle them with confidence in two and three dimensions. For example, GCSE students respond well to investigating texture, pattern and decorative design in making large-scale ceramic pieces.
- Students gain a secure understanding that reference to other creative practitioners is important in developing their own creative practice. They learn well about the practical techniques of others, taking careful studies and notes in sketchbooks and applying what they find in their own work.
- Progress is slower in learning about creative practitioners' motivations for making their work, or how they convey meaning through it. As a result, students do not always think enough about the purpose of their own work or how to communicate messages visually. This hinders the development of resolved outcomes as they are not always clear about what they are trying to achieve. The impact of this is seen more among the boys, who find it more difficult to sustain a good pace of learning than the girls.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- The teachers are enthusiastic and encouraging in their approach to teaching. Lessons have a positive atmosphere for learning and relationships between staff and students are good.
- Lessons involve a good range of activities, including regular discussion and effective use of electronic whiteboards to show resources. Teachers work hard to prepare lessons, making good use of their subject knowledge, for example to prepare demonstrations. Teaching assistants make an effective contribution to managing students' behaviour.
- Tasks in lessons are organised well and linked to learning objectives. However, the purpose of the work undertaken is not always made clear enough to students, or exemplified through reference to other creative practitioners' work. This means that while students often apply themselves well to tasks, they are not always sure of the underlying direction of their work so as to decide how to improve it independently.
- The students' progress over time is monitored well. Written and verbal feedback to students is regular and much is constructive, although expectations about how they should respond to feedback are inconsistent. A sharply focused approach has been adopted in the last year to identify those needing extra help to make better progress. Additional support, including after-school sessions, is starting to make an impact.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- During Key Stage 3, students encounter a good range of processes through work on a wide range of scales. They enjoy the themes studied,

which are being adapted to appeal more to boys. Their experiences give comprehensive coverage of art, craft and design-based approaches.

- Students' positive response to the Key Stage 3 curriculum means they opt for the subject in large numbers at Key Stage 4. Broadening the Key Stage 4 curriculum two years ago, to include the BTEC, has widened participation for this age-group, reflecting the department's success in including students in the subject. Progress on the BTEC is good because of clear learning and assessment structures in the course.
- The content of the curriculum is well-sequenced to help build students' knowledge and understanding. For example, their initial learning about colour is reapplied and extended in subsequent projects, and their work in three dimensions gains progressively in scale and ambition.
- Links to the work of other creative practitioners are well-chosen. They include references to work from different disciplines, contemporary practitioners and the visual practice of other cultures. However, students have relatively few opportunities to see at first-hand the work of other creative practitioners to deepen their understanding of it.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- Subject leadership is committed and passionate. This engenders effective teamwork among staff, reflected in the strengths in the curriculum, and sets the tone for the students' enjoyment of subject learning.
- Subject evaluation, sharpened in the last year, provides an accurate awareness of strengths and weaknesses in provision. The priorities identified for improvement inform development planning. However, it is not always clear how the desired outcomes, for example in teaching, will be achieved.
- The quality of subject monitoring is satisfactory. Good use is made of assessment information and work scrutiny to monitor the progress of different groups of students. The quality of lesson observation is satisfactory. However, observations sometimes pay insufficient attention to students' progress or the impact of current initiatives intended to improve the quality of teaching.
- Appropriate use is made of subject networks, such as professional associations, links with examination boards and liaison with local post-16 providers to develop provision.

Subject issue: how effectively students learn to draw confidently and creatively

This aspect is satisfactory.

- Students make satisfactory progress in using drawing to record what they see, including when studying the work of other practitioners. They

regularly encounter drawing within projects, although only BTEC students receive a systematic introduction to different approaches to drawing. These include a focus on using drawing as a tool to think with and for developing ideas. Others do not develop this facility so well, reducing their ability to work imaginatively when refining and developing their work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that they understand the purpose of their work so that their reflections about their progress and what to do next are clear
 - making more comprehensive use of references to other creative practitioners' work, including first-hand encounters, to exemplify how meaning can be conveyed
 - improving their ability to use drawing as a vehicle for thinking and developing ideas
- improving the impact of subject leadership by:
 - ensuring subject development planning explicitly considers how to bring about the priorities identified for improvement in provision
 - monitoring more thoroughly the quality of students' learning experiences in lessons and the impact of initiatives intended to improve teaching.

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