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Dear Mr Holroyd

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

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 26 and 27 January 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

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

The overall effectiveness of art, craft and design was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is outstanding.

- Students' attainment in GCSE has risen significantly over the last three years and is now well above average. Half the students gained A*-A grades in 2009, which is more than twice the national average. Teacher assessments indicate that a high proportion of students achieve the higher national curriculum levels by the end of Year 9.
- Students are committed to the subject and speak openly of their enjoyment. Many continue their work during break and lunchtimes and participate in after-school activities. Students work confidently with different media, often

on large scale and mixed media pieces, in response to both observational and imaginative starting points. Their work reflects personal interests and approaches to themes. Students' contribution to the arts is recognised through the school's arts awards.

- High quality visual research through drawing and reference to the work of artists or designers underpins all project work. GCSE coursework contains vibrant collections of ideas, research and experimentation with a wide range of different media and techniques. Sketchbooks are well annotated with technical notes and evaluative comments.
- Students make effective use of digital media to develop and manipulate imagery, and the school has plans to develop this further through providing access to computers and specialist software in the art rooms.

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. Teachers plan interesting, challenging tasks for students, which result in high levels of engagement and concentration. Clear learning objectives are shared with students, with a strong focus on developing independent learning, and encouraging students to think and resolve problems for themselves.
- Lessons have a calm and purposeful atmosphere. The brisk pace and varied activities keep students well-motivated. Teachers provide good support for students at risk of falling behind through after school and Saturday sessions.
- Peer and self-assessment are used well to encourage students to evaluate their own and other's work. This supports their understanding of how to improve. Teachers provide regular feedback to students, identifying strengths and specific targets for improvement.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum is very well planned to ensure that students experience a wide range of art, craft and design activities. The recent expansion of GCSE courses to include graphics and textiles has increased the proportion of students taking an art subject in Years 10 and 11 and more boys are now taking an art option. Effective partnership with local secondary schools and the tertiary college has extended the curriculum further through the creative and media diploma.
- Work in Year 7 to 9 ensures that students develop skills and confidence in using formal elements and applying these in a range of contexts, including observed drawing and painting, design and illustration and three-dimensional work. Topics chosen for GCSE ensure that students' work explores a variety of approaches and artistic references and builds well on the skills developed during Key Stage 3.

- The specialist arts status has had a significant impact on work across the school and in the local community. The school works closely with a wide range of educational and creative partners to promote the arts and creativity within local schools and for adults in the area.
- Opportunities for cross-curricular work are clearly identified. The recent inclusion of a visual communications strand in Year 7 design and technology is enhancing design skills and use of digital media in art, although these links have not yet been fully developed for three-dimensional design work. Plans are in place to extend cross-curricular and community provision through a new creativity centre in the school and re-modelling of the art and technology accommodation.
- Students have opportunities to work with creative practitioners and community artists and most say they have experience of visiting galleries or museums to study works at first-hand. The school acknowledges that this aspect of their work could be developed further, through forging stronger links with local arts venues.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- Rigorous and self-critical self-assessment has led to significant improvements in students' attainment in GCSE. Having identified that students' widely differing prior experiences of art impeded progress in Key Stage 3, the school has embarked on an extensive programme of work with seven feeder primary schools. Staff development activities to develop primary teachers' skills and confidence have been well received, and Key Stage 2 pupils have benefited from attending sessions with a visiting artist.
- The school has a very clearly articulated vision for developing a creative approach to teaching and learning across the school. Best practice in arts teaching has been used as a model to encourage teachers in all subjects to adopt more creative activities which engage students and support more independent learning. Students recognise the impact of this in enhancing their enjoyment of learning and helping them 'think outside of the box'.

Subject issue: How effectively do students learn to draw confidently and creatively?

This is outstanding.

- Teachers and students see drawing as central to developing creative art and design work and have a very broad understanding of different approaches and the varied purposes of drawing. Opportunities for observational and imaginative work are planned in each year through Key Stage 3 and students' drawing skills are regularly assessed.
- Students develop skills and confidence in drawing from observation, memory and imagination and activities are carefully planned to ensure opportunities to explore all these aspects. For example, the use of symbolism and fantasy as a GCSE theme encouraged students to draw imaginatively and from memory to

explore and represent dream imagery, and to invent new images through representing what happened five minutes later in the dream.

- Students often use drawing to support their learning and understanding in other subjects. The invention of visual characters to represent qualities of metals and elements in a science lesson reinforced students' understanding of specific material properties. Different subject displays around the school frequently include students' drawing or model-making work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- strengthen cross-curricular links between art, and design and technology to broaden students' experience and use of a wider range of media and processes, including 3D
- develop sustained partnerships with local arts venues to ensure that all students benefit from opportunities to study art and artefacts at first-hand

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