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Mr N McGowan
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Dear Mr McGowan

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 22 and 23 March 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 students and staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of eight lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is outstanding.

- Attainment in external examinations has been consistently above average, as is the proportion of students achieving higher grades in GCSE, AS and A-level courses. Teachers' assessments indicate that a high proportion of students achieve the higher National Curriculum levels by the end of Year 9.
- Students are highly committed to the subject and speak openly of their enjoyment. They work confidently with a wide range of media and processes, often on a large scale and with mixed media, in response to

both observational and imaginative starting points. They develop their own personal responses to themes, drawing on clearly structured visual and contextual research. This fosters a strong sense of independence, particularly evident in the highly personalised, reflective and mature response of many sixth-form students.

- Students develop strong critical and evaluative skills through detailed and carefully structured responses to artists' work. At all stages, they make their own responses in relation to the work of others, rather than merely collecting or copying imagery. Annotation and evaluation present an informative account of students' own artistic journeys and the development of their ideas, demonstrating a clear understanding of what worked well and how work could be improved or extended.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teachers are very knowledgeable and demonstrate considerable passion for the subject. They consistently plan interesting and challenging tasks for students, introducing them to a diverse range of historical and contemporary practice to extend their knowledge and understanding. Students work intensively in lessons as varied activities are well paced to maintain their concentration. Subject matter is varied and frequently challenging and enables students to explore a wide range of imagery, style and interpretation. Homework tasks are used well to extend students' skills and understanding.
- Students value the open-ended nature of many projects, which enables them to explore personal interests, extend their knowledge and ideas and work on ambitious projects. Regular assessment, including written and verbal feedback, helps students to identify the progress they have made and how to improve and extend future work.
- Teachers know their students well and provide well-targeted support in lessons, and challenge the more able to push the boundaries of their work to maximise progress and achievement. They provide good support and guidance for students choosing to study art at higher levels.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum is planned very well to ensure that students experience diverse art, craft and design activities, with a good balance of two and three-dimensional work. Students explore a wide range of media, materials and techniques, including different printmaking techniques, textiles and three-dimensional construction, modelling, casting and carving techniques. The recently introduced BTEC first diploma course is proving popular with students who have benefited from working in design technology to produce well-crafted final pieces in metal. Students have

further opportunities for extended working and cross-curricular projects through the school's 'super-learning' and art days.

- Students on GCSE and A-level courses have opportunities to use digital media in their work, and many use this confidently and independently. Sixth-form students value opportunities to work on film-based projects. However, the school acknowledges that students in Years 7 to 9 have insufficient opportunities to use digital media and plans are in place to provide appropriate equipment to support this.
- The school makes frequent use of gallery visits to support students' practice, and many GCSE and A-level students visit local galleries and museums independently. However, this is not systematically planned for students in Years 7 to 9 and students say that they would like to have such opportunities. The school makes regular use of visiting artists, for example, through lunchtime talks for students and additional opportunities such as life drawing. Sixth-form students benefit from a residential visit to a European city.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- The subject leader has developed a strong ethos for the department, ensuring that all students can explore different aspects of the subject and achieve their potential. Staff work together very well, sharing a strong focus on developing students' creativity through challenging their perceptions of art, broadening their horizons and fostering independence. Students' achievement is celebrated through extensive display around the school, in art studios and end-of-year exhibitions.
- Subject self-evaluation accurately identifies strengths, areas for further improvement and staff development needs. Managers have increased the number of lesson observations carried out and are beginning to use these to share good practice, within the subject and across the school. Students' progress is closely monitored and teachers provide targeted support where there is risk of underachievement.
- The effectiveness of the subject leadership is demonstrated through the high levels of attainment in all key stages; the high quality and diversity of students' work; the excellent relationships between staff and students and students' good progression to higher levels of study in the subject.

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

This is outstanding.

- Teachers place a strong emphasis on the development of drawing skills from Year 7 and students recognise its importance. This encompasses not only observational skills and the competent use of different drawing media, but extends students' understanding of different purposes of

drawing. Students of all ages cited examples of how they had used drawing to record from observation, memory and imagination, to plan their work and explore, visualise and communicate their ideas.

- Teachers plan carefully to develop varied approaches to drawing and different skills over time. In Year 7, they focus on developing observational skills and building confidence in handling formal elements and a range of media. In Year 8, students explore more imaginative and expressive responses while in Year 9 they develop drawing as a design tool, for example, using pattern and repetition. Drawing for three-dimensional work is used well to develop students' understanding of form, mass, solidity and space. A Year 10 project enables students to combine elements from different drawings to invent and create new objects and forms, developed into three-dimensional carving and construction.
- Sixth-form students benefit from regular life-drawing classes after school and these are also open to students studying GCSE. They value the discipline and challenge of this work and recognise how it hones their ability to observe and interpret subject matter. Good quality drawing is evident in all key stages, and sixth-form students demonstrate high levels of confidence and ability in applying what they have learnt to their personal interpretation of subjects and ideas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- enhancing students' experience of the subject during Key Stage 3 by:
 - providing opportunities for students to use digital media
 - planning systematically to ensure all students benefit from opportunities to study artworks at first hand through gallery or museum visits and working with creative practitioners
- strengthening cross-curricular links between art, and design and technology to broaden students' experience and use of a wider range of materials and processes.

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

Janet Mercer
Her Majesty's Inspector