

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs A Kahn
Headteacher
Fred Nicholson School
Westfield Road
Toftwood
Dereham
NR19 1JB

Dear Mrs Kahn

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 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 staff and students; scrutiny of relevant 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

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

- Overall, students make satisfactory progress in developing their subject skills, knowledge and understanding. Their progress on themed days is often accelerated. Effective work is created when students are taught how to use experimentation, for example lower school 'planets' using bubble printing and pastel blending. However, not all students understand that artists often learn from their mistakes by capitalising on the unexpected.

- Students who achieve a GCSE in the subject progress well in handling art media, tools and techniques. The students interviewed were very motivated and proud of their achievements. They record observations with increasing care and develop the confidence to express their own ideas. However, their work does not always express the strength of their feelings or capture the enjoyment of their sensory experiences.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Students' learning and progress are supported very well by enthusiastic teaching assistants who use their knowledge about individuals to build positively on what students can do. Their impact on achievement is best when the clear behavioural objectives combine subject-specific learning objectives with a variable aspect of lesson planning. Traditional techniques are clearly taught well, for example drawing from still life.
- Assessment in the subject is regular, but information is not always used to personalise activities, for example by enabling students to work on different scales or apply their existing skills referenced in sketchbooks, to fresh challenges. An impressive display inspired by the garden indicated that when students are introduced to a shared stimulus, but are taught how to explore diverse ways of responding, their creativity flourishes.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum enables students to access opportunities to work with specialist staff and occasionally work with visiting artists whose skills, for example in sculpture, complement those taught regularly. Students' wider experiences recorded on visits or explored through use of computers are underused. However, visits to see other students' work in a mainstream school inspire the students and contribute to their understanding of GCSE.
- Schemes of work are individually sound. Some links are made with other subjects and art forms, particularly on theme days. However, the lack of a long-term subject overview of progression accessible to all staff, limits the use of other subjects to reinforce or apply students' art, craft and design skills. Plans to use the common assessment framework to promote continuity and progression across the curriculum are at an early stage.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- Senior staff recognise the importance of visual communication, particularly in a special-school setting, and value the contribution of the subject to an increasingly strong core of wider arts provision. However, there is rightly a commitment to widening the impact of the subject on the achievement and personal development of more students, evident in the current

evaluation of different levels of accreditation. Subject plans are appropriate and informed by the involvement of an advanced skills teacher from another school. While positive about their experiences, students also shared relevant ideas about improvements, for example visiting a gallery.

- Links made with the community contribute to the effectiveness of the subject. For example, students' work exhibited in the local doctor's surgery and in the town hall in France where the school is twinned, help to realise the school's aim to enable all learners to 'recognise, develop and celebrate their own creativity as artists'. However, students' achievements in school are not always presented well, or shared in a way that promotes other students' curiosity, for example through giving value to process.

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

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

- Traditional drawing approaches are taught well, enabling students to develop the confidence to record observations with increasing skill and intensity. There is less evidence of students' creativity developing through mark-making and experimentation, which limits the range of students who believe in their capacity to draw. Drawing is used frequently by non-specialist staff to communicate with students and evaluate their understanding in other subjects. However, not all staff are confident in their own drawing or how to contribute to students' progress in drawing.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing students' confidence in using art, craft or design expressively by:
 - using the wide range of knowledge and assessment information about individual students to personalise the curriculum
 - enabling more students to make connections with other artists, craftworkers and designers through first-hand experience
 - developing regular use of sketchbooks to store experiments, record outside experiences, extend ideas and capture feelings
- strengthening the impact of the subject across the school by:
 - providing clear indicators of progression in the subject and identifying opportunities to apply students' learning more widely
 - establishing a focal point that celebrates students' creative achievements and informs others about how it came about.

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

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