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Dr S Bizley  
Headteacher  
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Dear Dr Bizley

Ofsted 2010–11 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 9 and 10 June 2010 to look at work in art, craft and design.

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 without their consent.

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

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

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

- Although attainment in GCSE art and design has been below average for the last two years, students currently on GCSE courses are making good progress. The vast majority are reaching their expected target grades, with a significant minority exceeding these levels. Results for the small number of students taking AS- and A-level art courses are in line with the high national average.
- Students work confidently in a wide range of media, developing good practical skills. Drawing from primary and secondary sources is central to all project work and students are developing good observational drawing skills. They develop individual responses to set themes, exploring ideas and topical issues that are important to them.

- Teachers place a strong emphasis on developing critical and evaluative skills. Many students respond well to this, with the best examples demonstrating perceptive, critical analysis of other artists' work and some good reflective and evaluative annotation of their own work. However, some students are still reluctant to annotate their work fully, and some annotation remains descriptive rather than evaluative.
- In the sixth form, students produce some lively and inventive sketchbook work, but the quality is not always carried through to the final pieces. In a minority of cases, final pieces lack the intensity of application and assured handling of media evident in the preparatory work.
- While students often use information and communication technology (ICT) to research artists' work and find relevant supporting images, they have few opportunities to use this as a creative tool to develop their own work. The exception to this is in AS- and A-level photography, where students make good use of digital media and specialist software to manipulate imagery creatively.
- Students' experiences in art and design make a strong contribution to their personal development and well-being. They speak positively about their enjoyment of the subject and how teachers support them to think for themselves, make personal choices and become more independent in their learning. They have a well-developed understanding of how developing creative approaches and using their initiative can help them in other areas of life and work.

#### Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge and expertise well to plan interesting and relevant activities. They share lesson objectives with students and regularly reinforce key learning points and the use of specialist subject terminology. High-quality visual resources stimulate discussion and inform students' own work. Good teacher demonstrations and exemplar material help students know what to do. Students are enthused and inspired by the colourful displays of art work in the department.
- Teachers make good use of directed questioning to check learning and extend students' understanding. Regular assessment provides helpful comments to enable students to improve their work. Teachers review students' sketchbooks regularly, checking whether improvement points have been acted upon. Students know their target grades and are clear about current levels of progress and how to achieve their targets.
- Progress in lessons is generally good but, occasionally, hampered by the relatively short length of lesson time available, when productive working time is limited. Students value opportunities for more extended work, for example, through the school's enrichment days, which enable them to develop a more concentrated way of working and accelerate their progress. In such sessions, teachers are able to develop more demanding

work, which inspires students and stretches their thinking and practical skills.

## Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum is well planned to support students' acquisition of subject skills and a good knowledge of the work of other artists. Opportunities for developing observational drawing skills are planned for each year group, although systematic planning to explore other approaches to drawing is less well developed.
- The subject leader has substantially revised the curriculum in the last two years to provide much greater breadth of activity which meets different students' needs and interests effectively. Students value the opportunities to make personalised choices about interpretation of subject matter and the use of different two- and three-dimensional media and techniques.
- Students who have visited galleries and museums, or worked with creative practitioners, have found this interesting and beneficial. However, these experiences are not routinely planned so that all year groups can benefit. The school has begun to use Arts Awards to recognise achievement for a small number of students and is considering how this could be usefully extended to others.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- The subject leader has made clear improvements through the revised curriculum and a more creative approach to teaching and learning, which enables students to make personalised choices about their own work. Self-assessment accurately identifies strengths and areas for further improvement and action plans set out clear priorities for further development. New managers have taken prompt action to improve students' attainment through a thorough revision of the curriculum and allocating more time for students to study on GCSE courses.
- Staff use data well to monitor students' progress and identify any areas of underachievement, so that targeted support can be provided promptly. The subject leader monitors the quality of teaching and learning closely, providing appropriate mentoring and coaching to support improvement. Students' progress and quality of work are improving as a result.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement in external examinations by:
  - improving the quality of finished pieces to reflect the strengths evident in developmental sketchbook work

- ensuring that all students develop good critical and evaluative skills and annotate their work to demonstrate clearly the sequence of development
- enhancing students' experience of the subject and their learning by:
  - ensuring all students have opportunities to study art works and artefacts at first-hand and work with practitioners
  - planning to increase opportunities for longer periods of learning
  - increasing opportunities for all students to use digital media creatively to develop their ideas and imagery.

I hope that 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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mercer  
Her Majesty's Inspector