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Mr McCaffrey  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr McCaffrey

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 6 and 7 July 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.

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

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

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

- Students' achievement in all key stages has risen significantly over the last three years. Pass rates in GCSE and advanced level examinations are well above national averages. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades in external examinations is also significantly above that seen nationally. The school has successfully eliminated the difference in attainment between boys and girls at GCSE. However, girls continue to outperform boys during Key Stage 3, where a greater proportion of girls than boys achieve or exceed their targets.
- Practical and written work is of a very high standard. Students work confidently on exciting and challenging projects, pursuing individual ideas and interests and producing high quality and experimental work in a wide

range of media. Much work is ambitious in scale and in tackling complex ideas. Sixth form students, in particular, are very articulate in conveying the intellectual and conceptual approaches evident in their work. Students from Year 9 onwards develop good technical and creative skills in digital media, through film, graphics and inventive animation work. These opportunities have not been so readily available in Year 7 and 8.

- Students learn to use sketchbooks well to record, research and develop ideas, and respond to artists' work from the start of Key Stage 3. As they progress to GCSE and A-level, students' sketchbooks become a highly personalised source of research material, a record of their own artistic journey and a means of critically reflecting on their practice. A-level photography students use blogs creatively to supplement or extend sketchbook and developmental work. Students are well supported to develop their critical and evaluative skills from Year 7 onwards, so that by GCSE and A-level, their analysis is critical and perceptive.
- Students use many different approaches to drawing confidently in their work. As well as developing skills in accurate observational drawing, students draw imaginatively and experimentally, for example working with unconventional materials, or drawing in response to music or dance.

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

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

- Teachers are passionate about the subject and communicate their energy and enthusiasm to students. Lessons are lively and fun, frequently including elements of surprise which fire students' imaginations and encourage high levels of engagement and motivation. Teachers foster students' creativity and individuality through encouraging playful experimentation and promoting the belief that students of all abilities can achieve well.
- Teachers get the best from students through setting interesting and challenging projects, which make students think for themselves and work beyond their comfort zone. For example, sixth form students in art and photography are given an unusual location to conduct a visual documentary project. Each student plans independently how to interpret the place and people who use it.
- Assessment is regular and students know their progress towards their targets. Examination work is marked rigorously against set criteria with helpful verbal and written feedback on how to improve and achieve higher grades. Teachers assess students' progress regularly during Key Stage 3 and include encouraging comments in sketchbooks. However, targets for improvement are not always sufficiently precise or detailed to help students know how to improve their work. Teachers do not always check that students have acted on improvement points.
- Students' work is displayed and celebrated in art rooms and around the school and frequently used as an additional resource to support students' work. Teachers make good use of the vibrant end-of-year exhibition to

showcase work from all year groups and to inspire students for the coming year. Older students often support younger ones in lessons and on specific projects.

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

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

- The curriculum is carefully planned to ensure students develop a sound understanding of key subject skills, through extensive opportunities for drawing, working with different media and techniques and exploring the work of diverse historical and contemporary creative practitioners. The creative use of digital media is well integrated so that students move freely and confidently between new technologies and more traditional ways of working.
- The wealth of extra- and cross-curricular projects enables all students to benefit from opportunities to study art and artefacts at first hand and work with creative practitioners. The school uses its extensive partnerships with local schools, colleges and arts organisations, developed through the Bournemouth and Poole Creative Hub, to enable students to work on large scale and ambitious projects. For example, Year 8 students are designing and making three site specific sculptures for the school grounds.
- The subject makes an important contribution to the school's specialist arts status and students benefit from frequent opportunities to work with other subject areas; for example, designing and building sets for school productions, working with textile students on fashion shows and shared field trips with geography or history.
- Students enjoy frequent opportunities to visit local and national galleries and museums. Residential visits to Cornwall and New York for the sixth form and gifted students from other years have broadened students' horizons and provided a wealth of source material to inspire their work. GCSE and A-level students' participation in life drawing courses at the Arts Institute extends their drawing skills.

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

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

- Excellent subject leadership has transformed the work of the department over the last few years, raising expectations and student achievement and increasing the number of students choosing to study at GCSE and A-level. The staff team are wholly committed to promoting creativity and supporting students to develop individually and work independently. Even though achievements are already high, staff are not complacent and are continually seeking further improvements. They introduce new ideas and projects each year so that staff and students share the sense of discovery and exploration together.

- Self-evaluation is rigorous and accurately identifies the subjects' many strengths, but does not ignore those areas where further improvements could be made. Staff have already revised aspects of the Key Stage 3 curriculum to raise boys' attainment.
- The subject leader is at the forefront of the school's work on developing creativity through the curriculum. This is encouraging staff in all subjects to reflect on current practice and identify further opportunities to work more creatively. All subject areas have identified specific ways to strengthen cross-curricular links to share and extend good practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- Raising attainment and progress for boys in Key Stage 3 so that they achieve as well as girls by:
  - revising curriculum content and ways of working to meet boys' needs and interests
  - increasing opportunities for students to use digital media in years 7 and 8
  - ensuring targets for improvement are sufficiently precise and detailed to help students know how to improve their work, and that progress on these actions is closely monitored

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 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