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Dear Mr Lloyd

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 23 and 24 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 nine lessons, two of which were jointly observed.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

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

- From average starting points, students make good progress in Years 7 to 9 in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills, predominantly in two-dimensional media. By Year 9, standards are above average. Girls generally do better than boys in line with national trends. Students' use of three-dimensional and digital media within the subject, or understanding of designers and makers who use these media, is very limited. However, their confidence in handling graphic media, adventurous use of colour and understanding of visual composition inspired by fine artists, are excellent.
- Following strategies to improve the proportion of boys opting and succeeding at GCSE, uptake of different groups is good. Students are

driven by their enjoyment of the subject, their relationships with staff and the opportunities to express their imagination; they are not disappointed. They make excellent progress in refining the skills developed in Key Stage 3 leading to outstanding attainment in Fine Art. With the exception of A*, students' grades are higher compared to those in other subjects and schools taking the option nationally. Students' impressive investigative and evaluative skills contribute to lively and meaningful paintings and mixed-media work.

- A typical proportion of students progress into the sixth form but retention, and progression to art-related courses after leaving school, are high. While the media used are often familiar, their handling of more challenging subject matter and independence in researching artists are advanced. Life drawing tackles students' tendency in earlier years to depend too much on secondary sources. Increased confidence in using art to reflect on personal experiences, explore individual styles and express inner feelings is evident. Students' positive attitudes continue, but leadership, for example through inspiring younger students or pursuing an Arts Award, is underdeveloped.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teachers, including those who also teach other subjects, use examples of work effectively to enable students with different abilities to progress their skills. In one lesson, the teacher reinforced their understanding effectively by using computer-aided resources to demonstrate the process; the impact on a large group of students was motivational. Planning takes good account of the needs of different groups; some separate boy and girl groups have led to targeted teaching approaches, including role-modelling by staff. Teaching is consistently enthusiastic and learning well structured.
- Assessment is regular, and, following useful feedback from lesson observations, the best plenaries now actively engage students in peer-evaluation tasks. The introduction of reflective journals in the sixth form has raised expectations of students' self-evaluation in and between lessons. Strategies to support younger students are developing in line with the challenge of the new secondary curriculum to enable them to think and act like artists, craftworkers and designers, but few use sketchbooks to record and revisit experiences, ideas and observations or review progress.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- An innovative curriculum in Years 7 to 9 gradually combines practical with contextual studies, and enables students to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding through discrete and combined arts experiences. For example, a visit to Rufford Park is well timed to make an early impression

on students about responding to direct experience in different art forms. Themes are thoughtfully chosen to capitalise on the interests of different student groups and widen their experience, for example of multiculturalism. The strategy to start GCSE options towards the end of Key Stage 3 enables students to focus more on specific art objectives.

- The fine art GCSE and sixth-form courses build very effectively on students' prior learning. Their growing confidence in handling familiar media and challenging subject matter is excellent. Nevertheless, opportunities to learn how approaches used across the creative and cultural sector might be developed and applied, for example through the use of digital media, printmaking, photography, textiles or ceramics, remain limited within the subject. Creative practitioners and visits are used to enrich provision but use of school-based initiatives, such as curriculum days and 'fantastic Fridays', to promote intensive and innovative work are at an early stage.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- The subject is led with a high level of commitment, confidence and charisma that contributes to a supportive ethos across the teaching team that students value. Staff are equally well regarded by senior staff who enable them to support other specialists across the community of secondary schools that work together. The department is well placed to contribute to wider networking, for example by making links with the 'Campaign for Drawing', or by developing a sustained partnership with a gallery to broaden and build capacity for further improvement.
- A good track record of continuous improvement is informed by systematic monitoring, including evaluation, of students' views. Action research contributes to subject improvement, for example focused on raising boys' achievement. Records of lesson observations show that feedback is accurate and constructive reflecting the school's strong commitment to training and professional development. The impact on consistently good or better teaching, including non-specialist, is evident.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- broadening provision while continuing the improving trend in high performance achieved by different groups of students by:
 - increasing students' first-hand experience in and outside the classroom
 - enabling students to gain insights into the processes used by artists, craftworkers and designers and their applications in the wider world
 - making links with national initiatives in art, craft and design education.

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

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector