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8 July 2010

Mrs P Steele
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Steele

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 28 and 29 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 six lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

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

- Boys and girls develop a strong interest in the subject in Years 7 to 9. They make good progress in developing their subject knowledge, understanding and skills. Students develop their confidence in using the visual elements, particularly line, shape, colour and pattern. Some remain unconvinced about their ability to draw which exposes a limited perception about different forms and functions of drawing and influences their decision about taking an examination in the subject. However, many find different media and techniques, such as printmaking, rewarding. Their homework shows high levels of commitment, independence and ingenuity.
- Students taking a GCSE in the subject continue to make good progress, achieving A* to C grades slightly above national averages but significantly

above their other subjects. Students maximise their use of two weekly lessons and opportunities to continue work in the department after school, mirroring the conscientious and enthusiastic teaching they greatly value. While the range of media often remains familiar, their creative use of different techniques advances. Nevertheless, awareness of applied design or craft is more limited. The best work at GCSE, AS and A level skilfully combines observation and imagination, control and experimentation.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Lessons are prepared meticulously. Assessment is used well to pitch challenges for different groups of students. Subject staff use their own creativity to present resources attractively and informatively. Classrooms contain displays of work relevant to current projects which promote students' curiosity and make high expectations explicit. Computer resources are used expertly to engage students from the moment they enter the classroom. Images and music are thoughtfully selected to embrace students' interests while extending their cultural awareness.
- Teachers share their subject knowledge with great enthusiasm, often by sharing personal insights and experiences, for example their travels. The students appreciate the relationships they build with staff, which promote an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect in which they feel confident about expressing personal ideas and feelings through their work. The lessons observed structured students' learning well, and scrutiny of students' work indicates that teacher direction is appropriately balanced with opportunities for students to make choices and use initiative.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The choice of themes respects students' developing maturity and self-reflection. For example, boys and girls express great interest in the Mexican 'Day of the Dead' celebration, with spirituality a common theme revisited by students. However, while students thoroughly research themes across different times and cultures, for example 'tattoos', some would welcome more variety, including further direction about how to access the excellent range of nearby art galleries and museums. Visits are integrated into examination courses and work with contemporary artists and galleries is developing to complement the wider focus on developing students' personal, learning and thinking skills within and across subjects.
- The GCSE and sixth form courses build well on students' prior learning. However, the current departmental priority to increase the use of three-dimensional media, for example ceramics, is appropriate and in line with students' keenness to develop decision-making, depth and diversity as they progress through the subject. Existing links with design and technology enable older students to use resistant materials as an

expressive medium and the recent re-introduction of textiles promotes additional links. Plans to increase vocational opportunities also exist.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

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

- Consistently high-quality teaching and a rising trend in students' high attainment in the subject indicate that leadership and management are highly effective. The subject self-evaluation is well informed by internal review and external collaboration, embracing opportunities to learn from or contribute to good practice in other subjects and schools. Cross-curricular initiatives, for example with mathematics and science, show that subject distinctiveness is communicated clearly. Improvement plans show skilled prioritisation. However, the intended impact of plans to enhance provision on outcomes, is unclear. For example, accelerating students' progress, raising attainment or widening engagement, remain separate.
- Documentation in the subject is exceptionally thorough and systems used across the department, for example to assess and monitor students' progress, contribute to whole-school coherence while fulfilling subject-specific requirements. Strong and mutually supportive links with parents show demonstrable support for the whole-school issue, raised at the 2009 inspection, to further improve home-school communication. During the visit, letters of appreciation and a meeting with a group of parents very supportive of the work of the department, indicated that opportunities to gain insights into students' work, for example through open exhibitions or computer-aided sharing of lesson plans and resources, are greatly valued.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- building on and broadening students' examination success in the subject by:
 - enriching the curriculum for Years 7 to 9, including the role of sketchbooks
 - integrating vocational links and skills, including through assessment
 - ensuring that plans to improve provision and outcomes connect.

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