

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



21 January 2011

Mrs S Cryer  
Unity College  
Townley Holmes  
Burnley  
Lancashire  
BB11 3EN

Dear Mrs Cryer

### **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 11 and 12 January 2011 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 schools 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 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.

- In Years 7 to 9, students' current project work shows that they are able to work imaginatively and skilfully in two- and three-dimensional media. However, their portfolios include work that is below national expectations. The better work is often supported by thorough sketchbook research, drawing and design, for example, their shoe creations in Year 8. Current progress is satisfactory but longer term progression in refining subject skills or deepening knowledge and understanding, is evidently limited by inconsistent provision and expectation across the key stage.
- A high proportion of boys and girls take an examination in the subject. Recent and current work represents good progress from low starting points at the start of the school year. Provisional grades for 2011 indicate standards close to national averages, reversing a decline in standards

since 2008. Impressive drawing from direct observation, underpins the improvement in quality of students' work. Intricate, colourful, mixed-media work is an emerging strength. The use of digital media is underdeveloped.

- Boys and girls respond purposefully to teachers and support staff, but their independence and initiative, particularly in making connections between their own work and that of other artists, craftworkers and designers, is at an early stage. They know that the work of others is a stimulus and not a solution to developing creativity, but there is not enough critical analysis of the process, purpose and meaning, constrained by students' lack of direct experience of galleries or visiting artists.

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

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

- Good lessons were observed during the visit. However, the impact of teaching on students' attainment over time indicates inconsistent quality. Although examples exist of probing questioning, detailed marking, use of stimulating artefacts and computer-aided imagery, not all teaching contains these qualities. Staff are beginning to use plenaries to reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching besides sharing students' achievements. The best teaching shows that reflective practice is used to adjust planning.
- Relationships between students and with staff often stimulate a climate of enjoyment, support and active participation. Teachers and support staff know individual students well, including their needs, interests and abilities. However, although inclusion in lessons is a strength, information could be used more effectively to pitch specific challenges or sensitise opportunities for individual students to express personal feelings and insights, visually.
- As a result of previous inconsistencies in provision and underachievement in the subject, teaching is currently focused on raising standards in Years 10 and 11 as a priority. The balance between teacher direction and students' creative development is appropriate now, but staff are aware that more consistently good teaching in Years 7 to 9 needs to be matched with increasing expectations of students as they progress through Years 10 and 11. Students' ownership is emerging but the confidence to select media, scale or artists to connect with, is slowed by limited experimentation. Opportunities to promote independence through specific study tasks are developing as part of a whole-school initiative.

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

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

- The new subject curriculum introduced in all years at the start of the school year has been welcomed by staff and students. Further plans are in place to widen the range of accreditation to include opportunities to specialise or pursue a vocationally related course. Although it is early to evaluate the impact on standards, students' positive attitudes and promising work currently, indicate that the curriculum engages their interest, enables students with special educational needs and/or

disabilities to participate fully, and now supports students in continuing the subject post-16. This represents a satisfactory basis on which to build.

- Students experience an adequate range of two- and three-dimensional media but insufficient opportunities are provided to use digital media as a creative tool. Suitable references are made to artists, craftworkers and designers working in different cultural contexts but work with living artists, or links with those inspired by the locality, are at an early stage. The students interviewed during the visit were keen to visit an art gallery as part of their course and learn more about out-of-school opportunities. Staff recognise the potential of the new school building as a gallery space.
- Opportunities to relate the subject to the wider curriculum are developing through an innovative cross-curricular course introduced in Year 7. Early indications are that staff and students are very enthusiastic about developing and applying subject knowledge and skills in different contexts. Collaboration has also sharpened the assessment of students in the subject. Subject staff are also positive about developing links with performing arts, an established strength of the school's specialism.

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

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

- Recent strategies to improve provision and outcomes are effective. Students' improved attainment, starkly evident in Year 11, indicates that subject priorities are focused well. Action plans that identify clear milestones each term, ensure that the pace of improvement is rapid and that the impetus of a new subject leader is maximised. Although there is more teamwork to be managed, for example through distributed leadership, staff are strongly supportive of changes and acknowledge that students' achievement in the subject has been inadequate for too long.
- Collaborative work within the school is developing rapidly through student-centred initiatives, for example the new Year 7 curriculum. Productive community partnerships have also stemmed from practical opportunities to work together, for example a tapestry created with the support of the Prince's School for Traditional Arts. However, some opportunities have been missed, such as school 'Arts Week', to build sustained partnerships between art forms, and school and art communities outside.
- Improved monitoring and analysis of students' performance in the subject is evident, in line with whole-school approaches. The subject area is evaluated regularly as part of the faculty review cycle. Nevertheless, strategies to reverse the decline in standards in the subject have impacted slowly, masked to some extent by the continuing popularity of the subject, whole-school priorities to improve literacy and numeracy, and flourishing performing arts within the same Expressive Arts Faculty.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- continuing to raise standards in the subject by increasing opportunities for students to:
  - work with practising artists, craftworkers and designers
  - experiment with different media, including digital technology
  - learn about and visit art galleries and museums
  - reflect on and express visually, personal feelings and insights
- ensuring that good or better teaching is sustained by:
  - evaluating regularly and collaboratively the impact of teaching on outcomes achieved
  - using marking to identify clearly and comprehensively what students need to do to develop the depth of their work
  - adapting best practice observed in other schools, in other subjects at the school, including within and across the arts
  - increasing ownership of students and leadership of staff, in different projects, including wider school curriculum innovation.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design at Unity College.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

**Ian Middleton**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**