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Mr S Jones
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Dear Mr Jones

Ofsted 2011–12 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 22 and 23 June 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 five lessons, including one jointly observed.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is currently satisfactory but historically, is inadequate.

- In the lessons observed, students made satisfactory progress in developing their subject skills, knowledge and understanding. The students interviewed enjoyed their work in the subject, particularly topics that enabled them to express personal feelings, for example in response to the 'personal identity' theme explored in the interface between Year 9 and 10. Some student groups have also responded more effectively to a brief.
- The school's baseline assessment, focused on observational drawing, indicates that students' skills are broadly average on entry. Their drawing skills progress satisfactorily, improving markedly when supported by opportunities to approach drawing inventively, as in Year 7. Although an

inconsistent feature, the more adventurous work in the sixth form draws on a repertoire of mark making to express imagination energetically.

- At GCSE, standards achieved are below the national average, particularly for boys, who have chosen the subject in greater numbers than nationally. The proportion of top grades is low. Although the gap is narrowing slowly, students generally do better in their other subjects. The work of too many students in the past has remained at a similar standard throughout the course, partly due to outcomes that require additional refinement.
- Students know about an adequate range of artists, craftworkers and designers. However, where their knowledge is limited to what, rather than how or why their work was created, the impact on students' own work remains superficial. A visit by Year 10 students to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park has deepened students' understanding of three-dimensional concepts and improved their standards, inspired by experience of what is possible.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- The teaching observed was satisfactory and included good features. Lessons are planned and prepared conscientiously. Lesson objectives are made clear. However, the wider relevance or applications of the lesson are not always made clear enough. For example, how a pattern might be developed into a textile print, why complementary colours are used in advertising or when teamwork is used in the creative industries.
- Computers are used effectively as a tool for teaching, incorporating provocative images, and often integrating students' work skilfully, which values students' achievements alongside those of creative practitioners. Teachers also often present guidance sheets for students well, showing how text, images and backgrounds combine effectively. These techniques set a good example for the students in improving research presentation.
- Staff provide regular feedback to students through extensive marking and discussion informally, and through reviews and tutorials. The impact on students' progress is lessened where previous targets are not reviewed or students' actions pursued sufficiently rigorously. However, good practice is emerging that includes students' self- and peer-assessment, and incorporates digital images of the work being scrutinised and evaluated.
- Behaviour is managed well. However, in the lessons observed, students' independence, or ability to sustain interest, was rarely put to the test because teacher-led tasks and talk often dominated. Time for practical work is sometimes too short, limiting opportunities for the students to organise and evaluate experimentation, or review and refine their use of different tools and techniques.
- In one lesson observed, the teacher used assessment information effectively to pitch different challenges. Selecting artists, whose work varies in complexity enabled all students to interpret their self-portraits in the style of a given artist. Having captured students' interest and supported them in making connections between their own work and that

of others, they enabled students to be well prepared to incorporate other artists' styles, independently.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Students are given an adequate range of two and three-dimensional media to learn about: digital media is at an early stage of development. The range of artists, craftworkers and designers referred to is also satisfactory. However, students' first-hand experience of creative practitioners is limited, mostly, to those students that are taking the applied GCSE option. There is further scope to celebrate the work of teachers as artists.
- Similarly, visits to art galleries and museums are used mostly at GCSE, AS and A-level, limiting students' earlier exploration of scale, form, surface and structure. Local resources are generally underused, including references to artists, craftworkers and designers who have been inspired by the locality. However, multicultural stimuli are encountered regularly throughout the subject curriculum.
- The department has considered the appeal of topics to different groups of students. For example, a war and conflict topic in Year 9 has stimulated a wide range of responses from boys and girls. There is further potential to relate topics to other subjects to deepen students' understanding. For example, linking their work related to identity to issues explored in their personal, social and health education courses.
- The range of examination options that includes a vocational route through an 'applied' course, and plans to widen choices further, is sound. While the Key Stage 3 curriculum is still evolving through revisions to schemes of work and reviews of the outcomes, the aim is rightly to support students in making more informed decisions at 14. Improvements are beginning to support students' progression in key subject skills, for example drawing.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

The effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design is satisfactory.

- The department's capacity to improve is strengthened by excellent new facilities, due to open next term, that are providing an excellent opportunity to raise the aspirations of the department and stimulate teamwork. The subject leader and specialist staff, in their second year working together, are working cohesively to improve provision and promote higher achievement. Nevertheless, improved outcomes are emerging slowly.
- Improvement planning identifies an appropriate set of priorities. However, the roles, responsibilities and measures of success require further definition to make the most of the individual strengths of staff, and ensure that expectations are clear. To ensure that aspirations are sufficiently high,

more direct reference should be made to best practice existing across the school, and in the wider subject community.

- Staff response to whole-school leadership is a strength. For example, the school's focus on professional development related to assessment for learning has improved departmental practice. The school's leading teachers have also supported recently qualified staff effectively, for example in developing students' positive attitudes to learning in the subject. Staff are well positioned to share best practice within the department in the future, as they move into adjacent accommodation.
- The department is moving forwards following a track record of inadequate performance. The recent success of some A-level students in reaching high grades has helped to shape a vision that includes a stronger leadership role for more experienced students. Work shown is helping to raise expectations visually, although annotated display, designed to help students satisfy challenging assessment criteria, is underused.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising students' attainment in the subject by:
 - using exemplary work to raise students' creative aspirations and to illustrate how and why the work meets assessment objectives
 - ensuring that assessments include a review of students' response to strengths and weaknesses identified previously
 - teaching students how to use their sketchbooks to review and refine ideas and skills as they develop their final pieces
- strengthening curriculum provision by:
 - enriching topics, particularly in Years 7 to 9 through more first-hand and practical experiences
 - increasing opportunities to experiment with media and learn about the methods used by creative practitioners
 - using focused activities to address underachievement early, including more frequent use of drawing and digital technology
- increasing the impact of subject leadership by:
 - developing and sharing with staff, students, parents and the art community the vision, plans and actions for the new facilities
 - enabling staff to exploit their strengths as teachers and creative practitioners, sharing best practice in relation to students' work
 - involving sixth formers strategically, developing and promoting their role as artists, supported by strengthened college links.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design education at the school.

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. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector