

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



20 April 2012

Mr N Binder
Headteacher
The Sele School
Welwyn Road
Hertford
SG14 2DG

Dear Mr Binder

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 28 and 29 March 2012 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, including four joint observations with members of the senior leadership team.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is outstanding.

- From below average starting points in Year 7, boys and girls make equally rapid progress through Years 7 to 9 with the vast majority of students meeting or exceeding their challenging targets.
- Students learn quickly how to develop individual and original responses to themes. They demonstrate excellent knowledge of artists, craftmakers and designers, enabling them to contextualise their own work with maturity and understanding. In Year 9 they enjoy exploring political and social issues that are relevant to their own lives, for example through a 'graffiti' and 'street art' project.

- Students' attainment in GCSE and BTEC is well above average with all achieving an A* to C grade or equivalent and the proportion of students attaining higher grades at AS and A2 is rising.
- As students progress through Years 10 and 11 and into the sixth form they build effectively on their earlier use of sketchbooks to record, research and develop ideas and responses to artists' work. Their research becomes highly personalised and reflective, containing regular review, critical analysis and evaluation.
- Students enjoy the subject and display high levels of creativity within their work. They explore and experiment with a wide range of two-, three-dimensional and digital media and are encouraged to explore the unfamiliar. For example, a sixth form student responded to the work of Sayaka Ganz by melting plastic forks to create intricate sculptural forms. This technique was synthesised with ideas relating to the theme of 'entrapment', which developed from studying the work of Nicola Malkin, resulting in visually exciting and conceptually strong outcomes.
- Observational drawing is not as strong as students' other creative achievements, sometimes lacking refinement due to insufficiently regular practice. However, three-dimensional exploration through the use of modelling and making of maquettes is imaginative and skilful.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

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

- Teachers are passionate about the subject and their enthusiastic teaching is reflected in students' strong motivation. Staff work hard to prepare ideas and resources for projects that inspire students and draw on their own practice. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used creatively to engage students and props such as a 'thinking box' promote curiosity very effectively.
- Departmental planning is thorough and lessons are well managed, taking account of the needs of groups and individuals through differentiated resources. Students are well supported and are confident to seek help or advice, as needed.
- Assessment is frequent and students' progress is closely monitored. Teachers provide detailed written feedback. Lessons make continuous reference to assessment criteria; this ensures students gain a deep understanding of the objectives and that regular self- and peer-assessment is highly meaningful. Students know their grades or levels and what they have to do to improve their work to meet or exceed their targets. Many students make use of lunchtime and twilight sessions to respond to feedback and improve their work.
- Students' work is displayed and celebrated in the art rooms and is frequently used as an additional resource to support teaching and learning. Students value the opportunity to share their outcomes and many spoke with pride at having work on display in the school foyer or in external venues.

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 that students experience a diverse range of activities and starting points. Students explore a broad range of media, materials and techniques, including three-dimensional modelling, construction and carving, printmaking, digital media and textiles. In the sixth form, students also explore darkroom and digital photography and their experiences are enhanced by visiting practitioners, whose technical expertise they value.
- Linked to the breadth of media are a wide range of references to artists, craftmakers and designers from different times and places. Local references to the work of Henry Moore and a visit to the Henry Moore Foundation offer an engaging starting point for Year 10 and Year 11 students who produce high-quality soapstone carvings in response to studying his work.
- Gallery visits in Year 8 enthuse the students and broaden their understanding of the purpose of art and how it was created. A wide range of visits for students in the sixth form links to coursework projects. Opportunities to engage first-hand with art and artefacts are enhanced through exhibiting work from the county library loan collection and through teachers' sharing their own work.
- The subject makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. Challenging subject matter and personal themes such as 'disfigurement' and 'dual heritage' are presented and explored intelligently and sensitively. There are strong cross-curricular links and significant opportunities for students to engage with community projects, as well as enrichment opportunities where students take part in materials-based workshops such as fused glass.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- The subject has benefited from a supportive senior leadership team. The impact of the subject extends to promoting cultural opportunities across the catchment area served by the school. Effective teamwork ensures that available resources offered across the faculty of which the subject is part, are maximised.
- Monitoring and evaluation are rigorous and accurate. Development plans address identified areas for improvement, set challenging targets in relation to outcomes for students and support a long-term vision for the department. Staff have already revised the curriculum through the reintroduction of GCSE to better prepare students for the demands of the sixth form curriculum, and to raise students' attainment further.
- Subject staff make valuable connections outside the school to enrich students' learning. They remain aware of subject developments nationally

and refresh their own skills through higher level study and involvement with their own creative practice, all of which contributes to driving the subject forward.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing opportunities for students to develop observational drawing skills to a higher level, to further increase the proportion of higher levels and grades attained, and promote students' capacity to sustain intensive drawing.

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

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Macfarlane
Additional Inspector