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Mrs J Dunn  
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Dear Mrs Dunn

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit to the art and design area with Peter Gale HMI on 04 and 05 March 2008.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of assessment in the subject and its impact on students' progress and creativity. 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons or part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of art and design was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are good.

- From below average starting points students make good progress, enjoying the subject very much and displaying excellent behaviour.

- Standards remain below average by Year 9 but the good proportion of students taking GCSE examinations in the subject continue to make good progress and attain results in line with national averages.
- Some of the more able students leave after Year 11 so attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average in the subject. Progress is good in AS and A2 courses with students achieving particularly successful work in photography. Those taking Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses achieve well.
- Less able students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are well supported and make good progress while more able students of all ages do not always fulfil their potential.
- Overall the students make good progress in developing observational skills and enjoy manipulating a range of materials. They use sketchbooks conscientiously to record the different stages of projects.
- The students' critical thinking skills are an area of relative weakness. They find difficulty understanding key concepts behind the work of other artists and deploying them to their own ends. They also struggle to evaluate and refine their own work without help and this hinders the development of original ideas and their willingness to take risks.

### Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic, have good subject knowledge and use it well for example to give guidance and to demonstrate techniques.
- Lessons are well managed and contain an interesting range of activities which engage and motivate most students. Interactive display boards are used effectively to show images and stimulate learning.
- Excellent relationships between teachers and students underpin the students' enjoyment of the subject and the good progress made.
- Teachers have high expectations of students and plan lessons well to promote progress. However tasks are not always sufficiently varied to meet students' differing needs, especially those of the more able.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- The subject is popular. Themes studied are engaging and students opt for it in good numbers when making curriculum choices.
- The curriculum provides good overall progress in learning. Subject staff work well as a team to adapt the curriculum further, for example through developing the vocational BTEC courses in recent years.
- Students use a wide range of materials and processes. Specialist technology status enables good access to information and communications technology.
- Exposure to other artists' work is good although there is relatively little reference to contemporary artists and designers.

- The curriculum is less effective in challenging students to think for themselves, notably the more able who are not routinely asked to complete more demanding work. Independent thinking is a school-wide weakness which is being addressed in the broader curriculum through critical thinking skills sessions in Year 7, although this has not yet impacted on students' learning in the subject.

## Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The subject leader and technology faculty leader work well together, setting a clear direction for subject development, fostering strong teamwork among staff and ensuring that students' learning within art and design is well planned within the wider technology area.
- A wide range of monitoring and evaluation strategies give leaders a good understanding of the main strengths and weaknesses in provision and the students' achievement. The outcomes are used well to inform curriculum innovation, support for staff and the management of resources. Nevertheless, some subject development priorities lack sharp enough success criteria; which impedes both their implementation and the monitoring of their impact.
- Work with external partners is good and is growing for example through planning for the new creative and media diploma next year.

Subject issue: the quality of assessment and its impact on students' progress and creativity is judged to be good.

- Students' progress over time is monitored well. Underachievement is identified accurately in most cases and teachers work hard to provide extra support. Feedback to students is good and sometimes excellent.
- Questioning is used well by teachers to assess progress in lessons and to extend and develop students' ideas.
- In some lessons assessment is modelled effectively by teachers, with work compared to assessment criteria in order to define ways forward and good use made of peer assessment. However this is not always the case and contributes to students' weakness in evaluating their work and generating meaningful short term steps toward long term goals.
- Assessment information is used well to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the subject. However in evaluating the impact of specific initiatives, too little reference is made to assessment information in order to evaluate the impact judiciously.

## Inclusion

Inclusion in art and design is good. Art and design staff are ambitious for each student and are successful in ensuring the majority, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress. The curriculum enjoys wide appeal and supports students' personal development, building their confidence, self-esteem and helping them develop good work habits and useful skills and understanding for the future.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising the level of challenge for more able students
- increasing students' independence in developing their work
- ensuring priorities in subject development planning are sharply focused and that evaluation consistently enables their impact to be measured.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your Local Authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long  
Her Majesty's Inspector