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Mr E Sherrington
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Dear Mr Sherrington

Ofsted survey inspection programme: English and Art and Design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the joint visit on 03 - 04 March to look at work in English and art and design.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject the visit had a particular focus on our current survey themes: independent learning in English and, in art and design, 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.

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 eight lessons in English and five in art and design.

English

The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory, with some good features.

Achievement and standards

Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory.

- Students join the school with average levels of attainment overall. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than average. Over time, examination results are broadly in line with the national average, though they fell last year when the school entered virtually all pupils for GCSE examinations in English language and the great majority for English literature.

- Overall, students make the expected progress. Last year pupils in Year 9 made good progress from their starting points and their results in national tests were significantly above average. However, the picture is more mixed in Key Stage 4. A high proportion achieves a pass grade in both examinations, and students attain well in English literature. Skilful teaching ensures that boys do as well as girls.
- Achievement in English language is average. Last year fewer students reached the top grades in English language than was typical nationally. There are indications that middle- and higher-attaining girls have not made as much progress as others.
- Students are overwhelmingly positive about English because there is much to enjoy in lessons. They work hard, encouraged by the generous support of their teachers. Many express their views independently, sensitively and in clear English, and most are enthusiastic readers.

Quality of teaching and learning of English

Teaching and learning are satisfactory with good features.

- Lessons are carefully planned to build on what students can already do and lead them towards suitably challenging objectives. Teachers have good relationships with students. Most lessons engage the interest of both boys and girls well through practical ways of learning and include a well-judged mix of speaking, reading and writing.
- Students are successfully involved in assessing their work and understand what counts as good. Teachers usually explain criteria well and give praise or criticism for a clear reason. Marking is regular and explains how to improve. Assessment is systematic and is becoming better focussed.
- Learning was occasionally limited because lessons did not give students a clear enough sense of purpose. Though discussions were generally well managed, more could be done to draw out and develop the views of less confident speakers.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work are kept under review to stay abreast of changes to the national curriculum and how English is used in the twenty-first century.
- Students spoken to enjoy the interesting variety of reading they meet in English. They encounter many kinds of text in class, including whole books. They keep records of the books they choose from the well stocked class bookshelves or the lively Learning Resource Centre.
- Teachers introduce students to useful websites for research and make good use of interactive whiteboards to bring vivid topical material into

lessons. Computers are used sensibly to improve students' writing skills, though the impact is limited by restricted access.

- The effective use of speaking and listening and drama is a strength. It contributes well to students' engagement with Shakespeare and to the confidence many show to express their opinions in front of an audience.
- The department exploits local links well to offer a rich menu of extra activities appealing to all ages, including a course run by a local football club to boost literacy and the chance to work with the local press to produce a high quality school newspaper. Coursework support classes are well attended and effective.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management are satisfactory with good features.

- As headteacher, you challenge and support the subject well so there is a good understanding of strengths and areas where students' performance needs to improve. The subject has a good track record in ensuring boys achieve as well as girls.
- Since taking up her post in September, the capable head of English has made a strong start. Responsibilities are appropriately shared with a dedicated team of well-qualified specialists.
- While it is too early to see impact, there is a firm focus on raising achievement. Guidance on high expectations and how to reach them has been shared within the teaching team. Clearly evident good practice in managing practical ways of learning and in assessment needs to be spread more effectively, so that all teaching is as good as the best seen.
- Monitoring of students' progress is increasingly precise, though systems to track this are not fully established.

Independent learning in English

Provision for independent learning in English is good.

- Because of regular and enjoyable practice, especially in reading closely, a good proportion of pupils are independent and enthusiastic readers.
- Students have good opportunities to make individual choices. For example, every student chose what to research and present for the public speaking competition.
- The wide range of writing pupils undertake includes individual imaginative and reflective responses, for example, to the way Dickens depicts places and characters.
- Students regularly do discrete homework which is purposefully linked to future work.
- Through regular experience of group work and drama, students learn to collaborate and express themselves lucidly.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress in line with their capabilities because teaching is well planned to meet their needs and because care, support and academic guidance are good.
- The teachers' effective skills of engaging and challenging both boys and girls in English lessons explain the distinctive absence of a gender gap. There is also little difference between the attainment of those taking free school meals and their peers in Year 9 tests, but more of a gap in higher GCSE grades.
- English teaching supports weaker readers and writers effectively. An intervention programme has recently been introduced to raise reading comprehension levels. Extra sessions help students reach their target grades at GCSE; there are good examples of written work being improved independently as a result of clear feedback.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising achievement in Years 10 and 11 especially for groups of students who make less rapid progress after Year 9
- ensuring more teaching is as good as the best by identifying and sharing good practice in key areas
- developing the use of focussed assessment to support planning.

Art and design

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- There is considerable fluctuation in outcomes at GCSE between GCSE art and the double award in art and design which is offered by the school. The combined results indicate that achievement has remained at around 65% overall for the last three years, below the national average. Students achieve slightly better results in art than in some of their other subjects.
- Students are making good progress currently in Years 7 to 9 and this is having a positive impact on achievement in Year 10. Progress and standards in Year 11 are satisfactory.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Students listen carefully in lessons and they enjoy the spontaneity that the curriculum

activities provide. They are made to feel welcome by teachers to work in the studios in lessons.

- Students arrive at the school in Year 7 with mixed experiences and attainment in art and design. Strengths in Years 7 to 9 are students' skills in colour, line and tonal work across a range of traditional and more recently, in digital media.
- Students at all stages show confidence to explore and experiment.
- The quality of students' drawing skills, depth of direct observation and ability to explore concepts in 3D are inconsistent across Key Stages 3 and 4.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in art and design are satisfactory overall with some good features.

- Teachers are well prepared for their lessons. They show good subject knowledge and use their skills effectively to demonstrate the use of media to their students.
- The work of other artists, designers and contemporary influences is used well to stimulate creative ideas and imagery. Teachers encourage and support students in developing skills and exploring the properties of materials and processes.
- Students at all stages are encouraged to be imaginative and the opportunities in lessons for self expression are a strong feature, increasingly so in Years 10 and 11.
- Teachers give clear explanations and ask appropriate questions to check understanding. In some lessons observed, answers given by students were short and could have been extended more fully. At the end of the lesson there were also some missed opportunities to ask students to talk to others in the group about whether they had achieved what they set out to do in the lesson and explain the stages in their thinking.
- Students receive constructive written and oral feedback on their work, and say they know what they need to do to improve further.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is good

- There is a good range of processes and media used particularly in 2D which includes printmaking using intaglio, relief and screen printing processes, colour media, traditional and new media. In Year 7, one project which students enjoyed greatly was based around the work of the illustrator Quentin Blake. A page of thumbprints was printed by each student and transformed into animal or human personalities with the addition of fine lines and lots of imagination.

- Some effective links are made with other subjects. For example, in Year 8 successful creative projects are organised between history and art to explore visually the history and issue of slavery.
- Using information and communication technology (ICT) as an artists' tool is being introduced into Key Stage 3 as well as for researching imagery. At Key Stage 4 some students, particularly boys, use the interactive screen with confidence to draw or use design software in their work. There are plans to introduce more opportunities to use 3D media into the curriculum, including opportunities to work in glass.
- An 'Arts week' with practitioner workshops is held for Year 9 students. This enables them to work with visiting artists and designers, for example, with Matt Jobling from the National Glass Centre at Sunderland. It is beginning to have a positive impact with greater interest being shown in continuing with art and design in Years 10 and 11. As a live project, older students are involved in designing and creating large scale banners which are used during matches at Middlesbrough football club. The striking designs have been developed from research and development into Russian poster work of the last century.

Leadership and management

The leadership of the subject is good, subject management is satisfactory.

- Leadership is good, particularly of curriculum development initiatives. These range from gallery visits, to setting up an art week for visiting artists and designers. Subject resources and equipment have been enhanced through partnerships with artists and industry. Other initiatives include externally setting up a network for local art teachers' professional development in printmaking.
- The management of art is satisfactory. In the subject review and at subject level there is insufficient information and analysis of different groups of learners and/or their progress in different aspects of art and design. This information could strengthen earlier identification of any underachievement; this area has been identified by the school as an issue to address.

Subject issue: The impact of assessment on learners' progress and creativity

This is satisfactory.

- The approach in the subject is creative and students' individual responses are encouraged. Boys in Year 11 are encouraged to develop their own imagery which interests them through print and ICT. The analysis of assessment information to support students' progress and develop teaching and learning is an area for improvement.

Inclusion

The subject's approach to inclusion is good.

- Students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are given effective guidance and support in the subject. In particular, some boys, at risk of disengagement, have been able to become motivated and achieve through their experiences in the subject. They are very well supported by teachers and have a good rapport with them.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing students' thinking in 3D, and quality of observation and drawing in both Key Stages
- increasing opportunities for students to reflect on their own progress and to discuss their work critically with each other
- monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning more systematically in relation to the impact on students' learning and outcomes.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English and 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/Learning Skills Council. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term and made available to the team for the next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Susan Bowles
Her Majesty's Inspector