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Mr D Matthews
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Matthews

Ofsted survey inspection programme – art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 and 25 September 2008 to look at work in 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 how well students 'learn to think and act as artists, craftspeople and designers, working creatively and intelligently' and 'develop an appreciation of art, craft and design, and its role in the creative and cultural industries that enrich their lives'. 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of a sample of lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- From average starting points students make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9 with some areas of strength. They enjoy the subject, working particularly well on projects which include an imaginative dimension. Skills in working from direct observation are average and the students' capacity to refine their work independently is variable.

- Students opt for the subject in good numbers at GCSE. They make good progress to reach standards above those in the majority of subjects in the school and those seen nationally, with examples of high quality work. The pace of learning is faster at this age because the students are more engaged in assessing their work and planning the next steps. Many develop ambitious and individual ideas but some lack the skills in using visual elements like colour, or control of drawing processes, to bring their ideas to a successful conclusion.
- Boys do well compared to their peers nationally as do students from the minority ethnic groups represented in the school.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are good.

- The most effective teaching is at GCSE level where teachers adapt lessons well to meet individual student's needs and help them develop a personal direction in their work. They involve the students well in evaluating their own progress so they take responsibility for what they are doing. Good tracking of each student's progress ensures that underachievement is identified and tackled. Boys' achievement is good because they work to short term deadlines within long term projects.
- Teaching for younger students is satisfactory. Activities are engaging but less effective use is made of assessment information to vary these to help all students achieve their potential. Opportunities are missed to support students in reflecting on their work and how to improve it. Their long-term progress is tracked well using National Curriculum levels but the students' understanding of these, for example when cited in marking or as targets, is patchy.
- Innovative work is underway to broaden teaching and learning through using the internet to make resources available to students and enable between-lesson contact with teachers.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum in art and design is good.

- The curriculum has strong appeal and a wide range of students opt for the subject in good numbers at GCSE level.
- In Years 7 to 9 students experience a good range of materials in art, craft and design, albeit with relatively little three dimensional work. Opportunities to work from imagination and secondary sources are good. Observational drawing is less well developed, sometimes hindering students' ability to communicate ideas. Some good links are made with other curriculum areas although the benefits of these to subject learning are not always clear. Steps to adapt the Year 7 curriculum in the light of new national requirements are good because they give students more opportunities for self-directed study.
- The GCSE curriculum is challenging. It builds well on earlier studies and places an appropriate emphasis on building students' ability to research and develop ideas. Themes are engaging, make reference to

contemporary visual culture and, crucially, allow students to produce work which is meaningful to them and which they enjoy doing.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are good.

- The subject leader, new to the school this term, has begun to settle well into a department where leadership has a good record of improving provision and raising standards, especially at GCSE level.
- She has a good understanding of what requires improvement, based on initiatives inherited from her predecessor and on her own analysis of students' achievement. Her priorities for subject development are challenging but the means to measure the impact made is not always clear enough or linked well enough to overall school priorities.
- The small teaching team has a history of working well together and with external partners such as galleries. A good level of drive and enthusiasm is evident, for example in developing the on-line resources and setting up the effective assessment systems at GCSE level.

Subject issue: the extent to which students 'learn to think and act as artists, craftspeople and designers, working creatively and intelligently' and 'develop an appreciation of art, craft and design, and its role in the creative and cultural industries that enrich their lives' is judged to be good.

- A strong focus on linking to the work of other creative practitioners ensures that students make good progress in using these opportunities to interpret the work of others and support their own studies.
- Students develop good skills in exploring ideas. Sketchbooks are used well, particularly at GCSE level, to support the making of final pieces and students are aware that artists make mistakes and learn from them. The majority of students are not afraid to try things out, valuing the diversity possible in the subject, although younger students require more support to exploit their initial ideas as work develops.
- Students have a good understanding of how the visual aspects of design are used in contemporary culture through connections in projects. Many undertake gallery visits to understand the work seen and how it is presented. There have been some good opportunities for students to work directly with creative practitioners and learn about what they do although the impact of this is not widespread.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure lessons in Year 7 to 9 contain activities which are varied enough to promote students' individual progress, independence and ability to refine and develop work
- link subject development priorities more clearly to those for the school as a whole and make sure success criteria are measurable in relation to the difference made to the students.

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