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Dear Mr Scott

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 5 and 12 February 2009 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 the impact of the new secondary subject curriculum that challenges you to develop students who 'think and act like artists, craftworkers and designers'.

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 you, the faculty and subject leader, students in each key stage, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observations of four lessons including one evaluated jointly with the faculty leader.

The overall effectiveness was judged satisfactory with good features.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are satisfactory with good features.

- Students start at the school having achieved average test results at primary school. However, their early work in art and design in Year 7 is often naïve, showing basic control of media and limited understanding of what is possible. The school uses baseline assessment in art and design effectively to identify and address the need to improve students' observation and drawing skills. A more comprehensive assessment of students' knowledge, skills and understanding is planned.

- Most students at the school enjoy learning about new art techniques or unfamiliar artists in Years 7 to 9. However, the quality of their early work is constrained by limited experience to draw on and in later work, by their inability to review, modify and refine their work. Not all students are convinced they are capable of achieving high standards by pursuing their own work to the full. Nevertheless, they remain positive about learning about the work of other artists, craftworkers and designers and by Year 9 most students reach average standards.
- An average proportion of students in Years 10 and 11 take GCSE or more recently a BTEC qualification in art and design. Boys and girls do well in relation to their other subjects and the proportion achieving an A*-C grade is similar or above the national average. A small proportion of boys and girls achieve A*-A grades. Every year a similar proportion of students progress onto art related courses at local colleges or at other schools with sixth form provision.
- Whilst some effective work is achieved by students in Years 10 and 11 limited refining skills constrain the achievement of higher grades. Some students remain dependent on their teacher for guidance about how to improve their work or for stimulation on the work of artists shown to them by their teachers. Nevertheless, they continue to respond very well to new experiences, for example the printmaking workshop introduced by a visiting artist. High quality prints achieved by Year 11 students in 2008 contributed significantly to their GCSE results.
- Students develop co-operative working relationships in the art rooms. Boys and girls are supportive of each other and appreciative of teachers' efforts to share interesting stimuli, including their own work. Opportunities to continue work with their teachers through extra sessions outside lessons are taken by many. Occasionally students also take initiative, for example in one lesson a student photographed her work with her mobile 'phone with the intention of developing the idea at home by manipulating the image on the computer. However, their use of digital media as a creative tool is generally at an early stage.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

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

- The art and design staff bring a wealth of relevant experience to their teaching and support roles. In the best lessons this is shared with the students, for example in one lesson students following a BTEC course were given an insight into the teachers' own prints and the costs involved in mounting, framing, exhibiting and selling a piece of work. However, staff are not always confident about moving away from their planning by re-shaping lessons in response to students' reactions.
- Teachers give careful thought to planning sequences of learning that enable students to succeed. During lessons, whilst individual support is a strength, and different activities are organised for those who finish early, the starting points and objectives remain too similar for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There is also scope for earlier identification and challenge for exceptionally creative students.
- Teachers provide a good range of opportunities for students to extend their work on particular projects by work outside lessons. However,

other students consider some projects too long. During the visit a focused drawing skills session effectively interspersed the routine pattern of lessons. The teacher and the students were clearly refreshed by a short, sharp and challenging experience.

- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used particularly well as a teaching tool where image and text are juxtaposed. However, the lack of window blinds in the studios limits the visual impact. Outdated furniture also creates a difficult working height. Nevertheless, more could be made of existing ICT resources in the school to promote its use by students as a creative medium. Also, whilst displays add colour and interest to the learning environment they could be used to make high expectations more explicit.
- Teachers monitor and evaluate students' progress regularly. Grades and comments are logged in sketchbooks in Years 7 to 9 which enable teachers and students to record their progress and set targets for improvement. In Years 10 and 11 examination objectives are frequently referred to, in whole group and individual discussion.

Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory.

- A typical range of themes are used throughout the Key Stage 3 and 4 courses. The curriculum is most effective where the mixture of subject matter, art media and related artists are carefully considered. For example the choice of John Piper's work in the context of a project about buildings which aimed to increase students' mark-making skills.
- Two-dimensional skills are more systematically developed than those involving three-dimensional or digital media. As a consequence, students have greater awareness of artists than designers and craftspeople, particularly in the contemporary world. Teachers make the most of their own inspiration. One lesson where photographing work using mobile 'phones developed unexpectedly illustrated the creative potential of exploring students' own interests further.
- Too many students remain dependent upon secondary sources. Nevertheless, teachers do provide resources that promote students' curiosity. In one lesson about landscape the views from the studio were effectively used to learn how to capture distance. The cut and torn paper collages used to demonstrate students' understanding were of good quality. A gallery visit is planned for students taking an examination but not all students are convinced by the specific purpose.
- Where artists in residence are used, either in lessons, as part of the summer school or residential experience they have a very positive impact on learning. Such opportunities are also used effectively as professional development for staff which has a long term impact on the breadth and richness of curriculum provided.
- Opportunities to gain accreditation at Key Stage 4 have been widened to include BTEC alongside the GCSE. The Arts Council arts award is an area for further consideration across the arts. Students are given clear advice about different art related options post-16.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are satisfactory.

- The management of art and design within an arts faculty leads to coherent organisation and consistent expectations of students across the arts. Monitoring is effective where the focus exposes similarities and differences across different art forms which are used to inform improvements for students. Whilst the faculty is supportive of the direction provided by senior leaders there is limited evidence showing how and when the arts take the lead in improvement, fully exploiting the potential of the arts to stimulate wider learning and achievement.
- The lead art and design teacher deploys the limited resources available judiciously. Contacts in the art and design community are used effectively to ensure that when additional resources are used, for example an artist in residence, their impact on students' achievement and personal development is maximised.
- Priorities for improvement are appropriate and suitably informed by self-evaluation. Nevertheless, improvement planning does not show sufficiently clearly how subject, faculty and whole school priorities link together or are informed by links with other educational settings or external agencies. However, the expertise of staff within the school and alert response to feedback are strengths, indicating good capacity to improve further.
- Art and design displays in studios and in public areas of the school make a positive and immediate impact, enabling many students to see their work celebrated. In addition, work completed at the summer school provides a strong statement about aiming high. More use could be made of exhibition to share and promote particularly creative and successful work, for example by increasing information about how and why work evolved and using students' very positive reflections as they progress through school.

Subject issue: the impact of provision on students' ability to 'think and act like artists'

This is satisfactory.

- Changes to the Key Stage 3 art and design curriculum are at an early stage of implementation but there are good whole school opportunities to grasp such as 'enrichment Fridays'. The new levels of attainment require a higher profile in order to further promote students' creativity.
- Work with practising artists is effective in taking students into the mindset of artists. However, not all students have been touched by such an experience before making their course options in Year 9.
- Working routines that enable students to recognise the artist in the teacher, for example through sharing their own work, contribute to their understanding about how artists think and act.
- Vocationally related projects are at an early stage of development but where the applications of the subject are emphasised in lessons

students learn how the subject might contribute to their future economic well being or that of others in the community.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increase the use of direct observation and students' first hand experience of creative practitioners and industries
- enable students to refine their work by learning how to reflect on their own work and analyse that of other artists to inform re-visitation
- develop provision in Years 7 to 9 in order to fulfil opportunities for greater flexibility and creativity in the revised subject curriculum
- communicate subject vision to students and staff to make the specific contribution of the subject to the arts faculty and school aims clearer.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art and design across 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.

Ofsted gathers information on the immediate and longer-term impact of survey inspections, both on the institutions themselves, and with a view to improving its own processes. To this end, I should be grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire and return it within the next ten days. We have also just sent a copy of the questionnaire by email. Please return your completed questionnaire to either the email or postal address on the form, not to me. We may also contact some schools by telephone after several months in order for us to gain a picture of longer-term impact. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector