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Mr M Coles
Principal
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Dear Mr Coles

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: music and art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit with Ian Middleton HMI on 25 and 26 November 2009 to look at work in music and art, craft and design.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus in music on inclusion and partnerships, and in art, craft and design on drawing.

The visit provided useful information that 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 judgements included interviews with students and staff, scrutiny of documentation including safeguarding arrangements, analysis of students' work including recorded performances, and observation of teaching including instrumental lessons in music.

Music

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Students join the academy with varied musical experience; some have sung in choirs or started to learn instruments, but others have much less formal musical education. Overall, standards on entry are below average.

During Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress to maintain below-average standards. The number of students receiving additional instrumental or vocal tuition is satisfactory and progress in this work is also satisfactory.

- The proportion of students opting for the GCSE music course was broadly average in 2008 and 2009. These students achieved above-average standards in their examinations and made good progress. A larger proportion of current Year 11 students are studying music and these students are making satisfactory progress. Small numbers take the A-level music technology course and these students make satisfactory progress.
- The number of students participating in extra-curricular activities is low. The academy has identified this as an area for improvement.

Quality of teaching of music

The quality of teaching of music is satisfactory.

- Between them, the three class music teachers have a good range of musical skills and experience in composing, performing, and music technology. Lessons are planned diligently with clear objectives. Procedures for completing tasks are explained clearly to students, although they do not always understand what they have to do to produce work of higher quality. This is because there is insufficient use of musical modelling and too much reliance on technical, verbal instruction. Consequently, students make satisfactory, rather than good, progress in developing their musical understanding.
- In some Key Stage 3 lessons, students lose interest and concentration because too much time is spent talking and not enough time is spent making music.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used appropriately and recordings are made regularly to keep records of students' work.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Appropriate time is allocated to class music lessons in Years 7 to 9. The scheme of work includes an appropriate range of musical styles and cultures. However, some repertoire is not relevant for students of this age, setting below average expectations of what Key Stage 3 students should achieve and taking insufficient account of students' interests and musical potential. There is appropriate planning for GCSE and A-level courses.
- The Year 7 programme includes opportunities for all students to experience learning an instrument, taught in small groups. However, the effectiveness of this provision is limited because there is insufficient thought given to the way that this work fits in with the rest of the Key Stage 3 programme. Moreover, in some cases, students are developing

poor techniques at an early stage without sufficient challenge and correction, an outcome of insufficient planning.

- There is a good range of additional instrumental and vocal tuition available. The choir, orchestra, jazz band and musical theatre productions provide further performance opportunities.
- The department is resourced well including ICT, keyboards and world-music instruments. A recording studio has been opened recently. There is a range of tuned percussion, including full-size orchestral instruments.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- The subject leader has a sound knowledge of issues in music education, ensuring that schemes of work are in place, lessons and rehearsals are organised well, and that the department runs smoothly from day to day.
- Lessons are monitored regularly. However, observations focus on the quality of generic teaching skills rather than the quality of students' musical learning. There is more emphasis on processes, rather than outcomes for students.
- Appropriate procedures are followed for checking and approving visiting music teachers. Other systems for promoting students' safety are in place although procedures for registering attendance at instrumental and vocal lessons, and those for maintaining high standards of hygiene with shared instruments, are not always followed consistently.

Subject issue: inclusion

- All groups of students are represented in additional tuition and extra-curricular activities. All additional instrumental and vocal tuition is provided free of charge. However, the academy recognises that those in receipt of free school meals could be better represented in musical activities.

Subject issue: partnerships

- There are good links with some feeder primary schools, through the subject leader's regular visits to lead and support classroom and instrumental work.
- There are regular opportunities for students to work with musicians from professional organisations such as the Royal Opera, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Barbican Centre. However, the academy has not built links with other sectors such as the commercial and popular music industries, to reflect the interests of other groups of students and to reflect the academy's specialism.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising standards of work and interest in Key Stage 3 lessons by:

- increasing expectations for the quality of students' musical responses
 - making more use of teachers' musical modelling and less use of verbal explanations
- ensuring that the instrumental programme in Year 7 is planned effectively to complement the work done in class lessons and ensure that students practise good techniques from the very first lesson
 - developing partnerships with the commercial and popular music sectors, with particular emphasis on:
 - making music more accessible and relevant to a greater range of students
 - reflecting the academy's specialism.

Art, craft and design

The overall effectiveness of art, craft and design is satisfactory with good features.

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement is satisfactory overall, including good examination work.

- In Years 7 to 9, students make satisfactory progress overall, responding well to new experiences but remaining at a similar level when revisiting skills. Not enough students use their sketchbooks regularly to store experiments, observations or feelings to review, modify and stimulate later work. While the most able artists use their initiative to personalise work, for many students 'ownership' of projects remains with the teacher, which limits creativity.
- Students taking an examination in the subject make good progress, attaining standards similar to those achieved nationally. Boys and girls use observation and imagination well to compose images in two-dimensional and digital media. Their exploration of surface texture, through drawing and painting, contributes to effective work. However, creative ideas are sometimes limited by their making skills, particularly in three-dimensional media. Students' independence in making connections with other artists' work is widely variable but their depth of thinking is impressive when responding to open-ended themes such as 'journeys'.
- In the sixth form, personalised, well-presented research underpins the diversity and quality of students' achievements. Investigative work and in-depth analysis of particular media, such as textiles, advances their skills and confidence. Engagement with contemporary practice, for example through a partnership with Chelsea College of Art, heightens their creative and career aspirations.
- The students' view that the subject is one of the most popular at the academy is supported by their good achievement in relation to their other

subjects and their voluntary participation in workshops after school. However, their response to homework is patchy. Not all students are able to sustain their initial interest, their pace of work slowing or commitment at critical times limiting achievement. The 'arts awards' and 'art mentors' are promising initiatives but it is too early to evaluate the impact on participation and performance of more reluctant artists.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

The quality of teaching of art, craft and design is satisfactory.

- The students value the enthusiasm and expertise of different staff, used most explicitly when supporting individual students taking examinations in the subject. Where expectations are similar for the whole group, for example in Years 7 to 9, limited challenge, choices or element of surprise, slows the pace of learning.
- Teachers provide clear guidance to students in lessons and through written feedback that is regular and constructive. Older students are supported very well in learning about courses after leaving the academy, including through visits. Students would like to know more about art-related careers and generally teaching could make clearer links between lesson objectives, the attributes of creative practitioners and demands of the creative and cultural industries.
- Strategies to develop students' specialist vocabulary are evident in lessons. A common framework is used to help students analyse and write about the work of other artists. However, the written element of lessons remains unpopular. Where teachers use imagery in their lesson introductions or as a stimulus for writing, students respond more actively than when written or spoken words predominate.
- The most effective teaching observed used: a range of practical activities to interest different students; annotated displays to inform; teachers' own sketchbooks to inspire; and artefacts to promote observation. There were, occasionally, missed opportunities to use whole-class demonstration to tackle common weaknesses, for example how and when to use graded pencils.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

The quality of the art, craft and design curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of experiences but little innovation. Some projects, for example those followed by Year 8 and 9 students during the visit shared similar objectives, exposing missed opportunities to increase challenge. The most effective planning heightens expectations by promoting mixed-media work, enabling students to apply existing skills in new contexts.
- Links with the local community make a positive impact on the subject curriculum. For example, a sustained partnership with the Bow Arts Trust

supported the academy's recent contribution to the Lord Mayor's Show by enabling students to work with creative practitioners. Using the stimulus of local landmarks, students also learned how to use computer software to respond to a 'live' design brief.

- Students are given opportunities to use a range of two- and three-dimensional, digital and mixed-media leading to GCSE, AS and A-level qualifications. The textiles option in the sixth form integrates vocational links expertly but generally the academy's business and enterprise specialism could be embraced earlier and more consistently, for example by establishing closer links with the creative and cultural industries. Years 7 to 11 make no structured visits to art galleries nearby.
- Curriculum links with primary schools include 'outreach' workshops with artists which have been complemented recently by the introduction of a 'transition' period in Year 7. These initiatives have improved opportunities to build on students' prior experiences and promote the development and application of their personal, learning and thinking skills across phases and subjects. However, curriculum mapping across the schemes of work is too indiscriminate to identify opportunities to teach or assess specific skills.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- Support and challenge by senior staff is effective. The department is well resourced and monitoring is well informed. While the academy's business and enterprise, and sports specialisms could be more explicit, working within an arts faculty is beginning to enrich provision, for example through the introduction of the 'Arts Award' for all in Year 7, and use of the 'Artsmark' initiative to aid self-evaluation. Links with design and technology through textiles are valued by the students.
- Leadership and management have a discernable impact when clearly informed by evaluation of outcomes. For example, observation by the subject leader that students relied too heavily on secondary sources led to targeted investment in, and use of, artefacts. However, insufficient gallery partnerships still limit the impact of direct experience indicating the need for continuous evaluation.
- The department's response to external requirements, of the national curriculum or examination criteria, while satisfactory, is indistinctive. Management is sound but leadership is insufficiently driven by a clear vision statement backed up by opportunities for staff to innovate individually and evaluate collectively. Students have started to contribute to subject leadership but their strong and supportive views about the role and purpose of the subject indicates unrealised potential.

Subject issue: drawing

- Students learn to use a range of graphic media to record observations and develop ideas. Provision is enhanced by 'life drawing' for sixth formers and

some students have benefited from the Royal Academy 'Outreach' programme. Boys and girls taking an examination in the subject use drawing as a basis for confident sketchbook work. Their understanding about how creative practitioners use drawing and sketchbooks is variable. While community projects are popular with students, these have not included drawing initiatives such as the 'Big Draw'.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- accelerating the progress of students, particularly in Years 7 to 9, by:
 - ensuring that students' individual starting points are known and built on
 - increasing the use of experimentation and issues-based approaches earlier on
 - developing students' responsibility for lesson preparation and follow-up

- strengthening curriculum provision by:
 - establishing earlier and sustained links with art galleries and museums
 - making connections with the creative industries through the specialism
 - ensuring that staff and students play a full part in innovation and evaluation.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop these subjects in the school.

A copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be made available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector