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Dear Mrs Woodrow

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 10 and 11 February 2010 to look at work in art, craft 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 effectively students learn to draw with confidence 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 included: interviews with students and staff; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of four lessons, and three cross-curricular sessions as part of the school's business, enterprise and empowerment programme.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art craft and design is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment in GCSE examinations in the subject is low. The proportion of students achieving an A* to C grade in the subject improved in 2009, but remains low in relation to the national average. Strategies to raise standards are effective in ensuring that, overall, students are now making satisfactory progress in relation to their low starting points.

- Students use a good range of media and techniques, but the quality of students' work suffers from a legacy of low prior attainment. Sketchbooks consist of isolated pieces demonstrating limited progression in developing ideas, refining skills or applying new techniques. While students often refer to other artists' work, they do not make sufficiently strong connections between this and their own ideas, imagery and technique.
- More promising work is being developed in some areas; for example, Year 8 students produced good drawing, printmaking and digital images during a cross-curricular day in art, design and technology. This provided a wealth of material and opportunities for students to develop a sustained response to a theme. Examination preparation for Year 11 students shows clear improvement in their work from Year 10.
- Students develop good relationships with their teachers, enjoy practical work and behave well in lessons. They are able to sustain interest when working on projects over a whole day and value the extended length of lessons recently introduced.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teachers plan individual lessons well, and share lesson objectives with students, although it is not always clear how different tasks and activities link to overarching themes and what their specific purpose is. Teachers often introduce interesting ideas and themes, but students' responses are not developed systematically in depth over time. Good teaching on the cross-curricular sessions observed enabled students to produce lively work within a tight deadline.
- Reviews of GCSE work, with detailed feedback to students on current achievement and specific points for improvement, are now a common feature of teaching. Staff have identified that assessment had been insufficiently linked to examination criteria, a reason why predicted grades have been too generous in the past.
- Teachers' marking in sketchbooks is regular, encouraging, and the best examples include constructive criticism. However, not all students are clear about how to evaluate their own work critically, relying on teachers' feedback. Students' annotation in sketchbooks is sporadic and comments are often descriptive rather than reflective.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Students have opportunities to explore printmaking, three-dimensional work and digital media as well as drawing and painting. Two and three-dimensional design work is less explicitly developed. A new curriculum plan provides a more systematic approach to the development of skills and subject themes. Coordination of different teachers' ideas, approaches and

resources is improving the consistency and quality of experience for the students.

- Few students have first-hand experience of visiting galleries or working with creative practitioners and most said they would value the opportunity to do so. Some students have benefited from attending sessions at the nearby art college, but these links remain underdeveloped. Students are enthusiastic about having more opportunities to work outside the classroom, for example, in the landscape or from architecture in the city.
- The school's specialist status in business and enterprise has been used well to promote the use of digital technology to explore image-making and manipulation, particularly through cross-curricular work across art and design and technology.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- The recently appointed subject leader has used accurate evaluation of provision and performance in the subject to take appropriate action. Staff are clearly focused on raising achievement through improving teaching and learning and curriculum planning. Students' progress is now monitored regularly and additional support provided where students are at risk of underachieving.
- A positive team ethos is evident where teachers are willing to share ideas and resources to improve their practice. Monitoring and evaluation of lessons are used to set clear improvement targets for teaching and progress is monitored through further review and performance management. Strategies have had a positive impact on improving the proportion of good or better teaching and higher standards of students' work are apparent. Nevertheless, the school is aware this is only the start of a sustained programme of improvement.
- Senior staff provide effective support. A clear vision for future development is emerging for the department, based on curriculum planning and wider partnerships with schools and local colleges that meet different students' needs and interests. Shortcomings in students' drawing skills and weak responses to thematic projects are being tackled as priorities.

Subject issue: the development of students' confidence and creativity through drawing is inadequate.

- Observational drawing is taught in each year group, but this is not planned systematically to ensure students build on previous learning and make good progress year on year. Consequently, students' drawing skills are underdeveloped, and the quality of observational drawing is often lower than that expected for their level of study.

- The subject leader acknowledges the need to extend the range of drawing approaches to improve students' observational skills and confidence in handling different drawing media. Students are aware of different purposes of drawing and how different approaches might be used, but they have few opportunities to explore imaginative, expressive or inventive purposes of drawing, or to learn how other artists and designers use drawing in their practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising the standards achieved in art, craft and design by:
 - increasing students' capacity to develop ideas and apply practical skills in response to a theme over a sustained period of time
 - developing students' critical and reflective skills through self- and peer-evaluation and more evaluative annotation of their work
 - ensuring feedback on students' work is clearly focused on how to improve
- developing the curriculum by:
 - embedding a more coherently planned and clearly structured curriculum to develop subject skills, including varied approaches to drawing
 - increasing opportunities for students' direct experience of artists and art galleries
 - strengthening links with schools and the local art college to develop and share good practice

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

As I explained previously, 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

Janet Mercer
Her Majesty's Inspector