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Mr P Copeland
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Dear Mr Copeland

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Art, Craft and Design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 and 14 May 2009 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 how effectively the new secondary curriculum for art and design has been introduced which states that pupils will 'learn to think and act as artists, craftspeople and designers, working creatively and intelligently. They develop an appreciation of art, craft and design, and its role in the creative and cultural industries that enrich their lives.' We agreed that, as the school's intake begins with Year 9, I would not expect to see the new secondary curriculum for art in place at this time. Nevertheless, we agreed that I would look at the way the school is planning for the development of creativity and the demands of the new secondary curriculum when it reaches Year 9.

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 four lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good. The examination results pupils achieve are outstanding.

- Pupils arrive at the school having achieved widely varying standards in art and design in the earlier stages of the National Curriculum.

- By the end of Year 9 pupils respond well to the department's focused approach, make good progress and achieve a good and sometimes excellent level of subject skills, given their age and ability and the relatively limited curriculum time available in Year 9.
- Their progress in developing knowledge and understanding is satisfactory to good but does not match their progress in the development of making skills. The knowledge the pupils gain is restricted to a relatively limited group of artists and genres. Nevertheless more able pupils show good and inventive ways of presenting their research, including the creative use of information and communications technology (ICT).
- Art and design is a popular subject at Key Stage 4 with about one third of the year group taking the subject. Overall, pupils achieve good and often outstanding standards of subject skills within a closely defined range of activities.
- Pupils create beautifully crafted work in two and three-dimensions, investigating many of the qualities of line, tone, colour, pattern and texture. Art work is often impeccably finished, with subtle use of colour and texture, using carefully selected patterned imagery.
- All levels of ability make good progress, including less able pupils. However, although the work is of very good quality, there is an unmistakable 'house style' which places a ceiling on the scope pupils have for creative and independent thinking.
- Standards of knowledge and understanding are satisfactory to good, although less consistent than making skills, and less wide ranging than they could be, particularly for the most able pupils. Pupils show some knowledge of the work of artists, craft workers and designers although the most able do not always develop the levels of knowledge of which they are capable.
- Results in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Art and Design are excellent, with all candidates in 2008 gaining at least a Grade C, and half of them achieving A or A* grades. The school's GCSE provision enables moderately and less able pupils to make very good progress and achieve well for their age and ability.
- Post-16 work is good and in some cases outstanding. Examination results at Advanced Level (A2) reflect the high standards achieved. The causes of a slight dip in Advanced Supplementary (AS) results last year have been identified, with AS candidates set to achieve at expected levels this year.
- Sixth formers work to consistently high standards, often showing exceptional making skills, particularly in graphic skills and the use of colour and texture. Personal development is seen in the good and often outstanding handling of colour and texture.
- The more adventurous sixth formers explore and understand a wide range of artists using their own initiative, although less confident and less able sixth-formers are not well served by a limited demand to find out about and understand more and varied aspects of art, craft and design.
- Pupils enjoy the subject and value highly the success they achieve in creating well crafted and visually attractive art work. They feel safe, secure and well cared for in the art department.

- Pupils contribute well to their school community through art, which is displayed when that is possible, and through co-operating well with each other.
- Pupils' future economic well being is supported by learning how to organise their work effectively. There are not always enough opportunities for robust independent thinking which would help pupils in developing creative solutions.

Quality of teaching and learning of subject

The quality of teaching and learning are good. Some features of teaching are outstanding.

- Good quality teaching helps pupils, including the least able, to progress well and enjoy art and design. Teaching strategies are well matched to the needs of the pupils and the projects they undertake.
- Teaching shows exemplary levels of organisation and management; for example, in helping pupils to prepare examination portfolios. This a key factor in the examination success that pupils achieve.
- Pupils learn very effectively how to manipulate materials, in both two and three dimensions, and teaching imparts a good and often exquisite sense of visual effect. The teaching strongly establishes approaches and routines in the use of colour, texture and pattern which pupils use consistently in their work. Pupils are taught how to use ICT as part of the image making process.
- Teaching reflects the very secure subject knowledge of teachers in the areas they cover and their understanding of how to help pupils succeed in examinations. Teaching makes good use of visual resources relevant to the specific aims of the projects, but is less effective in encouraging pupils to research and explore independently the wider world of art, craft and design beyond the limits of often closely prescribed projects.
- Assessment by teachers is frequent and accurate, and encourages pupils to develop a focused aesthetic sensibility in the use of materials and techniques. The nature of the curriculum means that scope for self assessment by pupils is not as extensive or challenging as it could be, particularly for the more able.
- The care, guidance and support provided by teachers are outstanding. Pupils have positive and trusting relationships with their teachers, who at times use humour very effectively to promote learning.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good overall.

- The art and design curriculum meets National Curriculum and examination requirements well, enables pupils to acquire a range of art skills and ensures they gain success at GCSE, AS and A Level.
- Overall, the needs of different pupils are catered for, most notably the least and moderately able.
- The curriculum at Year 9 and post-16 meet pupils needs successfully, but the curriculum at Key Stage 4 is less effective in challenging the most able because it does not build in sufficient risk-taking and creativity.

Leadership and management of subject

Leadership and management are good.

- This very busy department is managed well, with organisational flair.
- The department responds well to the school's focus on the analysis of examination data in order to improve results. The department has developed very successful practice at GCSE and at AS and A Level, through tried and tested approaches which have sustained success.
- The department works hard to manage the deficiencies in storage facilities arising from the large volume of work which pupils produce, and which must be retained for examination purposes.
- The resources available are managed efficiently. Nevertheless, the extension of the curriculum is limited by a narrow range of visual resources and technical equipment.

Subject issue: the extent to which pupils 'learn to think and act as artists, craftspeople and designers, working creatively and intelligently' at Key Stage 3 was not separately judged due to limited evidence restricted to Year 9.

- The school makes good provision for pupils to develop art and design skills through a well defined and successful approach to teaching and learning, but one which does not offer enough scope for more open-ended and creative thinking, particularly at Year 9 and Key Stage 4. The school's technology faculty, and the art department as part of that faculty, is in the process of reviewing the curriculum, focussing on creative and independent thinking and research.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- Build confidently on the department's high levels of examination success by incorporating more creative, open-ended planning and practice, particularly with a view to raising the aesthetic and intellectual challenge for its more able pupils
- Extend the range of resources available to promote the development of pupils' creative diversity and independence through the art, craft and design curriculum.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop art, craft and design throughout 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

Peter Jones
Additional Inspector