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Mr A Porteous
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Dear Mr Porteous

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 15 and 16 March 2011 to look at work in art, craft and design.

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 schools will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of lessons including one jointly observed with you; and visits to after-school photography and ceramics sessions.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Students' achievement in art, craft and design is outstanding.

- Students make good progress in Years 7 and 8 which accelerates in Year 9, 10 and 11, contributing to GCSE results well above national averages. The proportion of boys and girls achieving A* or A has increased continuously over the past three years, over 60% attaining A* or A in 2010.
- High standards are underpinned by students' commitment and creativity. Research is typically wide-ranging, analytical, and well presented. The visual elements are explored with confidence and flair through different techniques, often flourishing following bold mark-making with pen.

- Students develop their ideas fluently through continuous review and reflection which promotes refined outcomes in two-, three-dimensional and digital media. The immediate impact of their work is strong, supported by deeply considered and powerfully expressed feelings and viewpoints.
- Knowledge and understanding about other artists, craftworkers and designers are used very effectively to influence students' high expectations of themselves. They strive for originality and quality by handling materials and techniques inventively and ingeniously but carefully and considerately.
- Students value highly, opportunities to respond individually from a shared starting point. Their work diversifies as they progress through school, including the range and quality of drawing which early on, is mostly observational and less experimental or analytical than their later work.

Quality of teaching of art, craft and design

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

- Teachers are highly committed to the subject, refresh their subject knowledge regularly and share expertise through strong teamwork despite studios that are far apart. Opportunities to support trainee teachers and work with creative practitioners add positively to the 'subject community'.
- Planning is thorough, taking good account of students' varied needs. The relationship between short-term activities and long-term objectives is explicit to students, which contributes to the purposeful pace of lessons. Detailed guidance that includes 'time limited challenges' contributes too.
- A wide range of assessment methods is used, integrated unobtrusively into lessons. Particularly impressive is the frequency of thorough, critical but constructive marking used alongside students' self-evaluation. Skilful questioning adds further to regular review of students' understanding.
- Staff model the high expectations they have of students, including sharing their own work as artists. Resources are well managed and computer presentations are attractively designed. However, staff are not afraid to share their less successful work to show how to learn from mistakes.
- Relationships between students and teachers are excellent based on mutual respect. Students confidently turn to their teachers if they need expert guidance. Equally, teachers encourage students to answer questions raised by their peers. Sometimes students lead demonstrations.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- The curriculum provides students with a wide range of in-depth experience of art, craft and design, including glassmaking, ceramics, painting and printmaking. As students progress through the school, they are also taught how to use mixed media and handle a breadth of drawing media.
- Linked directly to the range of media is a breadth of opportunities to learn about different artists, craftworkers and designers from different times and

places. These include workshops with contemporary practitioners and opportunities to visit art galleries in each key stage.

- Continuity between the school and Blackpool Sixth Form College is promoted well. Visits by students are planned sufficiently early to influence the direction of their work and career plans. Collaborative planning for the diploma also involved liaison with colleges and other schools.
- Links with the locality are established. For example, regular workshops with the 'Pilling potter' are popular with students in all years, teaching and support staff. A recent light installation for Blackpool illuminations involved students and designer Andy McKeown. External competitions are frequent.
- The accreditation available to students from Year 9 onwards, is matched to the maturity of their work in the subject, and their ability to specialise. The quality and frequency of assessment in the subject are critical factors in matching students to different options available.

Effectiveness of leadership and management of art, craft and design

The leadership and management of art, craft and design are outstanding.

- The subject is led with drive, determination and dynamism, which draws support across the school and wider community. Roles and responsibilities within the department are shared effectively, enabling staff to develop professionally and students to enjoy consistently high-quality provision.
- Subject self-evaluation is exemplary, a sign of the continuous and coherent reflection, review and remodelling that is routine to staff and students. The impact of provision on the progress of different groups, in relation to all 'Every Child Matters' outcomes, is reviewed rigorously.
- Staff and students focus strongly on reaching their potential, the proportion of students achieving A* or A GCSE grades is part of a relentless drive to improve. However, the progress of students with special educational needs and/ or disabilities remains an equally high priority.
- Networking with art educationalists is promoted through a sustained teacher training partnership with Cumbria University. However, the contribution to national initiatives is at an early stage, for example the 'Campaign for Drawing' or the Arts Council 'Arts Award' scheme.
- The department successfully promotes students' achievement across the school through high-quality exhibition and display, and by fully supporting whole-school initiatives. For example, the diverse assessment approaches stem from whole-school strategies and professional development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing earlier the department's diverse approaches to drawing with different media and for different purposes, particularly in Years 7 and 8
- sharing the best practice developed, through national networking.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector