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Dear Mrs Allen

Ofsted 2011–12 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 21 and 22 February 2012 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 institutions 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; and observation of six lessons.

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

Achievement in art, craft and design

Achievement in art, craft and design is good.

- Students make good progress from starting points that for many are below average academically. Their early work in Year 7 successfully exposes students who join the academy able to draw confidently and creatively. This remains a strength of students' work in later years.
- The proportion of students taking a qualification in the subject is rising. Students gain above average A* to C GCSE grades in the subject. However, the proportion attaining A* or A grades is small. The subject is a more popular option with girls and their progress is more consistently good.
- In the sixth form, boys and girls make particularly good progress in developing the expressive qualities of their work, influenced by their visits

to art galleries and challenging dialogue with their teachers. They combine mature thinking and skilled making well, working on a confident scale.

- Students' understanding and use of line, colour, pattern and form are strengths of their two- and three-dimensional work in all years. Digital media is used well by the students specialising. Across a range of media the exploration of surface, texture and structure is exploited less often.

Quality of teaching in art, craft and design

The quality of teaching in art, craft and design is good.

- Teachers build good working relationships with students as they progress through the academy. This has a particularly positive impact on the confidence of sixth form students to explore personal feelings and insights through the subject. Past students visiting the academy contribute to lessons very well.
- Clear guidance and support enable students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to enjoy success in their practical work. However, students whose work shows particular promise are not always challenged by follow-up work designed to push the boundaries.
- Attractively presented resources stimulate students' interest. Digital technology is used well to model layout, text and imagery. This has a positive impact on students' sketchbook presentation. However, students' untidy writing often detracts from their work and takes up too much time.
- All teachers prepare sketchbook pages themselves relevant to the lesson and this is successful in making expectations clear to the students. Preparing students' thinking for the lesson or setting recording tasks during a demonstration or discussion, are underused strategies.

Quality of the curriculum in art, craft and design

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

- Students are introduced to a wide range of media, including drawing, painting, printmaking, textiles, photography and ceramics. This enables students to learn about a breadth of artists, craftmakers and designers, with the exception of creative practitioners visiting the academy.
- A good range of visits for students from Year 10 onwards includes local college exhibitions, nationally and internationally renowned art galleries. There are sound plans to increase the use of local galleries with younger students to capitalise on improved curriculum provision in Year 9.
- Provision for drawing is a strength of the academy. Students enjoy opportunities to draw in a range of media and on a variety of scales. Students become confident in drawing with mixed-media, although there is limited reinforcement of drawing across the curriculum, as a key skill.
- The timetable provides good opportunities to plan discrete subject work and experiences integrated with other subjects or art forms. For GCSE and

BTEC options, opportunities for sustained work over a continuous period of time are provided. Not all of these opportunities are fully exploited yet.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in art, craft and design

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

- An ambitious vision for the development of a community gallery at Brunel with the academy's university sponsor illustrates the good impact of partnerships on subject planning. Participation in a collaborative exhibition of sixth form work in Bristol Cathedral coincided with the inspection.
- The local academy subject network contributes to spreading best practice. For example, a ceramics workshop is provided by a specialist at Brunel. National initiatives, for example the Arts Award, 'Big Draw' and 'Firing Up' schemes are also being explored to promote further improvement.
- The subject promotes students' ability to express ideas, observations and feelings increasingly well as students progress through the academy. However, links between other art forms within the expressive arts faculty are not always exploited; for example, monitoring and promoting creativity together.
- Strategic planning is clearly focused on subject priorities and benefits from the good support of senior leaders. For example, a review and revision of provision in Year 9 has had a discernable impact on recruiting more boys and girls to the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the proportion of higher grades by pursuing the full potential of creative media, including the textural, surface and structural qualities
- providing earlier opportunities for students to experience a gallery visit and wider opportunities for students to work with creative practitioners
- using students' diverse responses earlier on, as an indication of their readiness to respond to different levels of challenge and subject matter
- exploiting opportunities to develop and apply subject knowledge, understanding and skills across the curriculum, including other art forms.

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

As 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.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector