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Mr P Norman
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Dear Mr Norman

Ofsted subject survey: identifying good practice in art and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10 June 2008 to look at the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on students' learning and achievement.

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 made included discussions with you, the subject leader, other staff and groups of students. I also observed lessons and looked at samples of students' work.

Features of good practice observed

- The use of ICT promotes excellent achievement and enjoyment in the subject for all students and makes a particularly strong impact on the progress made by the boys. Specialist visual art status, and the strength of ICT within the visual arts, contributes strongly to learning in the subject and helps raise students' expectations for what is possible.
- The work produced is of high quality across a range of disciplines including photography, graphics and fine art. The students are able to blend the use of ICT very effectively with other processes.
- The students develop excellent practical skills and confidence in using specialist software and equipment such as digital cameras. They take responsibility for their work and learn well how to organise their studies.

- The development and evaluation of ideas is strong because the processes used enable ideas to be freely explored, sequential versions saved and students know that any 'mistakes' are not indelible. This feature of ICT usage is central to the success enjoyed by the boys in particular.
- The students' have excellent knowledge of artists and designers who use ICT and use it very well to underpin their own work.
- Teachers make excellent use of ICT in lessons and in more informal sessions. Teachers and support staff work closely together and have high expectations of the students. They have excellent subject knowledge, enabling them to plan very well for the use of ICT, support students both technically and aesthetically and to accurately assess the progress made.
- Teaching and the curriculum is enriched by a wide range of artists and designers located in the school and increasingly through on-line contact via a virtual learning environment (VLE).
- Resources are excellent. Students have ready access to high quality computers, other equipment and software both for practical activity, research and for storing the work they do.
- The curriculum is very well planned to provide progressive challenge in the use of ICT without excluding other processes. As students move through the school they have access to a widening range of GCSE and A-Level courses which include excellent opportunities to use ICT in different ways.
- Project themes thoroughly engage students by being relevant to their lives and by using ICT in ways which reflect the visual culture they inhabit. As a result, work is often highly individual and explores themes of personal interest to students. This is especially motivating for boys as a whole and enables some disaffected students to re-engage with learning.
- ICT-related learning in the subject is well coordinated with that elsewhere in the curriculum. Art and specialist ICT staff work well together.
- The use of ICT plays a major role in projects aimed at developing relationships with the wider community including local primary schools.
- Subject leadership is committed to the use of ICT within the subject and is well supported by senior leaders. The use of ICT has grown rapidly and there is outstanding capacity to go further.
- Full attention is given within subject development planning to national subject initiatives. The subject leader's involvement with such developments, for example through work with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, enables the department to remain abreast of emerging issues whilst also contributing to them. Strategic decisions are carefully planned with due emphasis on outcomes for the students
- Resources are deployed very well. Staff development is a high priority and monitoring and evaluation is effective in defining areas for improvement and judging the impact of what is provided.

Areas for development

Alongside highlighting the strengths above, the visit also identified the following area for improvement which we discussed:

- develop further the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) as a resource to support teaching and learning.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector