

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr M Lambert
Headteacher
The Wordsley School Business and Enterprise and Music College
Briarley Hill Road
Wordsley
Stourbridge
DY8 5SP

Dear Mr Lambert

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: design and technology (D&T)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 21 and 22 March 2012 to look at work in D&T.

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 12 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 has improved in recent years. However, the proportion of students who attained grades A* to C at the end of their GCSE course remained well below average in 2011. Current school monitoring, based on accurate assessment information, indicates that attainment is set to rise further this year to be more closely aligned with the attainment seen in other schools. In the lessons observed, all students made good progress.
- Effective tracking and monitoring ensures prompt interventions are made to maintain students' progress. Students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, in particular, those known to be eligible for free school meals, are well supported and, as a result, make the same progress as other groups of students in lessons and over time. The quality of students'

written communication is improving as a result of effective strategies to improve their writing.

- Key Stage 3 students learn basic skills well. By the end of the key stage most have begun to develop their design capabilities but there are insufficient opportunities to extend them further.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- Learning in lessons moves at a good pace because teachers plan effectively to ensure that students are interested and engaged. Staff set high expectations of students.
- The effective use of peer- and self-assessment encourages high levels of independent work and helps students understand how to improve their work. Students value being able to develop their own unique design ideas and are justly proud of their work. Modelling of students' ideas is used well to help them to understand how to improve their work. Opportunities are sometimes missed to capture the development of students' thinking as a result of their modelling.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

The quality of the curriculum in D&T is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. The department rightly identified that electronics and systems and control needed to be developed and these are now included at Key Stage 3 and will be an option for those students who wish to pursue D&T in Key Stage 4 from this September. The department recognises the need to provide more opportunities for students to work with modern and smart materials.
- At Key Stage 3 opportunities are missed to develop students' design capabilities across the different material areas. Staff have begun to develop projects in Year 9 which pull together a wide range of designing and making activities which better reflect the design process.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

The effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T is good.

- Outstanding leadership is provided by the head of department. She has worked effectively to rebuild the department and bring together the new members of staff as an effective team who work hard and share a common ethos. All members of staff contribute effectively in the drive to improve standards. The love of subject and desire to do the best for every student is at the heart of all they do. There has not been sufficient time for the full impact of all the work to be seen in all the material areas. Tracking and monitoring of students' progress are extremely secure and used to support staff and to hold them to account.

- Health and safety procedures meet all statutory requirements. Students understood them well and this allows them to work safely with high levels of independence.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- sustaining the recent improvements in students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4
- ensuring that students' design capabilities are consistently developed across all material areas and that students' emerging ideas are captured.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector