

03 October 2006

Mr D Farmer
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Dear Mr Farmer

Ofsted survey inspection programme – design and technology and religious education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my joint visit with Barbara Wintersgill HMI on 20-22 September 2006 to look at work in design and technology and religious education.

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 lessons.

Design and technology

The overall effectiveness of design and technology was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and Standards

- Achievement and standards in design and technology are outstanding.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and advanced level is well above average.
- Key Stage 3 test results have been high for several years and show gains each year; this year, nine out of every ten pupils attained Level 5 or above with over half gaining Level 6.

- The proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) this year was nearly a quarter more than the national average and the proportion gaining A*-A over double the average.
- Results in advanced level Product Design were similarly impressive; all pupils gained A-C grades; around forty percent more than the national average.
- In respect to their starting points on entry to the school, pupils' progress and achievement are outstanding. In all key stages their designing is strong, they demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding of manufacturing techniques and they produce high quality products.
- Pupils' attitudes towards design and technology are very positive; their behaviour in lessons is exemplary and they show great interest in the subject.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in design and technology is outstanding.

- Teaching overall is good and often outstanding. Teachers have high expectations, set clear learning objectives and plan and prepare lessons very well. Their explanations, instructions and questions are presented proficiently with a precision that guides pupils' development highly effectively. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong.
- The teaching of resistant materials is not as consistently effective as that of the other areas of the subject; some teachers do not use sufficient strategies to respond to pupils when they encounter difficulties and their objectives and questioning are sometimes unclear to pupils.
- The highly effective use of assessment for learning is embedded in all aspects of the subject in all key stages. Well devised monitoring, recording and target setting procedures are implemented consistently. This provides pupils with a very clear picture of their progress and achievements and what they need to do to improve. The extensive use of exemplar materials to set standards and expectations is outstanding. Excellent analysis and use of performance data enables groups' and individual pupil's needs to be clearly identified.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- In Years 7 - 9 a broad and balanced curriculum is provided that lays a strong foundation for Key Stage 4. Units of work are reviewed and revised regularly to reflect contemporary developments in the subject and the changing interests of pupils. However, the carousel model of delivery reduces continuity and progression in pupils' learning and there are few strategies employed to address this.
- The curriculum plans for GCSE courses are highly effective and provide excellent frameworks for ensuring the development of pupils' subject capabilities and examination success. However, the school does not offer any vocational GCSEs for pupils who might prefer more work-related courses in the subject area.
- The detailed schemes of work and lesson plans for both key stages provide good guidance for staff.

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management in design and technology are outstanding.

- The leadership of the subject is outstanding with a clear vision for design and technology and high expectations set for staff and pupils. Subject leaders model good practice in their own teaching. Teachers share and support their drive for high standards. A strong team ethos has been established in which colleagues support each other very well. The leaders have clearly identified what enables pupils to make outstanding progress. Resources and accommodation are managed very well to create a productive working environment.
- The leaders' thorough monitoring of the performance of design and technology leads to very good self-evaluation of the subject and effective deployment of staff. The department development plans are effectively structured and focus on the key areas for improvement.

Inclusion

- All groups of pupils enjoy and achieve very well in the subject; this reflects the high level of support and guidance they receive. All have full access to the curriculum. Boys achieve above average but not as well as girls; good measures are being taken to improve boys' performance and they are starting to have an impact.
- Suitable opportunities are provided for stretching the most gifted pupils and teaching assistants are briefed well to assist pupils with learning difficulties. Equipment and furniture has been modified to enable disabled pupils to access the subject's facilities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the consistency of teaching resistant materials
- developing strategies to provide more continuity and progression in pupils' learning in Key Stage 3.

Religious education

The overall effectiveness of religious education (RE) was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and Standards

Achievement and standards in RE are satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is above average and it is broadly average at the end of Key Stage 3.
- The percentage of pupils achieving A*-C grades in the GCSE full course is well above the national average but the proportion gaining A*-A is average. Overall, this represents good achievement by Year 11 pupils.
- The progress made by most pupils in RE at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. It is not as good as the department thought because assessments of pupils' work in the past have been based on a misunderstanding of the level descriptions in the Cornwall Agreed Syllabus.
- Pupils' attitudes towards RE are positive and their behaviour in lessons is excellent. The pupils respond positively to opportunities for discussion and they are keen to learn about the religions that are not widely represented in the local area.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is satisfactory.

- There are many good features of teaching, notably teachers' love for the subject and their ability to make it interesting for pupils. It is satisfactory overall because at times it lacks the depth and rigour needed if all pupils are to reach their full potential.
- Pupils enjoy RE but think that it is an easy subject. This reflects the levels of challenge in lessons which are sufficient for all groups to make satisfactory progress but insufficiently rigorous to enable the most able to achieve the highest grades and levels. In particular, discussion, though enjoyable, is too reliant on pupils' uninformed

opinions and does not challenge them sufficiently to consider the criteria for making moral and religious judgements.

- At Key Stage 4 teaching seen was functional rather than inspirational and focused on developing pupils' ability to answer examination questions rather than inspiring them to develop a personal view about key issues that could be argued passionately.
- Although lessons were made interesting, few strategies were seen for actively engaging pupils. Discussion was largely teacher led and there was little use of cooperative work or independent learning. One Year 7 lesson was the exception where intelligently planned group discussion resulted in enthusiastic participation and learning.
- The use of assessment is restricted to end of unit assignments. The examples seen from previous years have been over-graded, especially where levels 5 and above have been awarded. Consequently, although pupils know their target levels these are not always realistic and many pupils do not have a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Marking is satisfactory but varies in the extent to which it provides helpful feedback to pupils.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4.

- The provision of GCSE for all pupils is a strength of the subject. The focus on social and ethical issues makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning and wider personal development.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 lacks coherence and is not providing a secure base for subsequent work at GCSE. In particular, the planning is not explicit about the pattern of continuity and progression and how each unit builds on prior learning.

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management in RE are satisfactory overall.

- The department is led by an acting-head, recently appointed who is managing the day to day running of the department effectively, with a commitment to raising standards.
- The use of setting from Year 7 has the potential to allow for teaching and planning directed at specific ability groups. In reality, all follow the same curriculum and resources and it is left to individual teachers

to decide how best to teach their classes, with no departmental strategies for differentiation.

- The subject self-evaluation and development plan provide a strong basis for development.

Implementation of the Agreed Syllabus

- The Cornwall Agreed Syllabus was published in 2005. To date, the department has done little to implement it. The planned review of schemes of work makes no reference to the curriculum principles on which the review will be based or any criteria for following one model in the local authority guidance rather than another. Neither is there any reference to, time, resources and rigorous success criteria related to the implementation of the new syllabus.

Inclusion

- Most groups of pupils make satisfactory progress in RE. High ability pupils are not given suitable targets to encourage them to achieve their potential.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the curriculum on the basis of sound principles to comply with the new agreed syllabus
- managing resources better to meet the needs of different ability groups
- helping pupils make better progress by increasing the rigour of teaching and by the use of more varied learning opportunities
- improving the accuracy of assessment and target setting in relation to the level descriptions.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T and RE in the school.

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

Nick Green
Her Majesty's Inspector