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Mr J Short  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Short

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 John Rudge AI on 7-8 November 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 satisfactory.

### Achievement and Standards

Achievement and standards in design and technology are satisfactory.

- On entry to the school, pupils' attainment in design and technology varies depending upon their Key stage 2 experience; however, their

general attainment is broadly average. Key Stage 3 results this year were above average; nine out of every ten pupils attained Level 5 or above with a third gaining Level 6. Generally, by the end of Year 9, pupils' progress and achievement are good but variable across the specialist areas of the subject.

- In the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) there has been an upwards trend over the last five years of the proportion of pupils achieving A\*- C grades from below average to average. In 2005 results rose to above average but returned to average in 2006. In Key Stage 4 there is much variability in pupils' attainment and achievement across the specialist areas of the subject. In electronics, pupils' attainment is significantly above average, in food technology it is a little below average, in resistant materials and textiles it is below average and in graphics well below average. Overall, in respect to their starting points on entry to the school, pupils' progress and achievement from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 are satisfactory; in electronics they are outstanding.
- Results in advanced level design and technology examinations are below the national average, however, pupils' progress and achievement are satisfactory in respect to their attainment on entry to the sixth form.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in design and technology seen during the visit was mostly good.

- Teachers plan and prepare lessons well based on clear learning objectives that are communicated fully to pupils. They choose and employ resources effectively. Their explanations, instructions and questions are presented skilfully. The pace of teaching and learning is good. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong.
- The teaching of resistant materials was not as consistently effective as that of the other areas of the subject; on occasions, learning objectives were not fully considered, tasks set to pupils were undemanding and questioning to develop pupils' learning was limited.
- Assessment in the subject is good. Well devised monitoring, recording and target setting procedures are employed. There is a good balance and frequency of formative and summative assessment. This provides pupils with a clear picture of their attainment and what they need to do to improve.

## Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 scheme of work is reviewed and revised regularly to take account of developments in the subject. In Years 8 - 9 pupils experience a suitable variety of activities across the different areas of the subject including a good introductory unit of work in graphics in Year 8. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is planned well to provide an appropriate framework for meeting examination requirements. Information and communication technology (ICT) is integrated effectively in units of work in both key stages. Subject specific external visits and after school clubs enhance the curriculum.
- However, in Key Stage 3, the carousel model of delivery reduces continuity and progression in pupils' learning and there are few strategies employed to address this. Also, the time allocated to the subject in this key stage is below the average found nationally and coverage of the National Curriculum Programme of Study is limited in respect to resistant materials, electronics and graphics. Some Key Stage 3 units of work have little relevance to the needs and interests of pupils. In Key Stage 4, the school does not offer any vocational GCSEs for pupils who might prefer more work-related courses in the subject area.

## Leadership and Management

Leadership and management in design and technology are satisfactory with good features.

- Food technology and textiles are managed by one head of department and resistant materials, electronics and graphics are managed by another: one head of department has overall responsibility for the subject. The performance of design and technology has improved steadily over recent years due to the sound management of the two heads of department. They have created a strong team ethos in each of the departments and are starting to develop a coordinated approach to planning and teaching the subject in Key Stage 3. The management of assessment for learning is good. Resources and accommodation are also managed well to create a productive working environment.
- However, the integration of the two departments is limited and this reduces the development of the subject. Pupils do not perceive the two departments and the specialisms taught within them as part of the same subject. In Key Stage 4, pupils opt for design and technology courses on a traditional gender bias; very few girls opt for resistant

materials or electronics, girls outnumber boys two to one in food technology and boys rarely opt for textiles.

- The effectiveness of self evaluation in design and technology is also reduced by the lack of integration. The departments produce separate annual reports which are limited in scope and those seen contained inaccuracies in reporting the standards and achievement of pupils. The use of assessment data to monitor and analyse the performance of the subject is underdeveloped.
- The separate department development plans outline clearly the objectives for the different areas of the subject. However, in parts, they are not well defined in detailing proposed action and contain no success criteria to measure progress in meeting objectives. Improvement planning is not sufficiently focussed on addressing rigorously the drop in standards and achievement of pupils this year.

## Inclusion

- Pupils enjoy the subject and display positive attitudes towards design and technology; their behaviour in lessons is good.
- No groups of pupils significantly underachieve and all groups have full access to the curriculum. The school has been successful in improving boys' achievement in design and technology over the last two years. There are now no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls.
- Suitable opportunities are provided for challenging the most gifted pupils and teaching assistants are briefed well to assist pupils with learning difficulties.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards in the subject, particularly, by improving the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning in resistant materials and graphics
- developing strategies to provide more continuity and progression in pupils' learning in Key Stage 3
- increasing the coverage of the National Curriculum Programme of Study in resistant materials, electronics and graphics in Key Stage 3
- reviewing the relevance of some Key Stage 3 units of work to the needs and interests of pupils
- introducing design and technology related vocational courses in Key Stage 4
- integrating further the leadership and management of design and technology across the two departments

- increasing the scope of self-evaluation in the subject and developing the use of assessment data to monitor and analyse the performance of the subject more accurately
- defining more specifically the proposed action and success criteria in subject development plans and focusing them more sharply on improvement planning to address the key areas for improvement.

## Religious education

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good.

### Achievement and standards

The achievement of pupils in RE is good.

- Standards achieved by pupils on entry to the school are average in relation to core subjects, and particularly English. They are, however, variable in RE dependent on the pupils' previous experience of the subject in their primary school.
- All pupils make good progress in the subject in Key Stage 3, so that their standards at the end of Year 9 are at least in line with expectations set out in the agreed syllabus, and often exceed them. They continue to make good progress in the GCSE short and full courses so that their results are above the national average. This progress also continues in the sixth form where their results in the GCE advanced level are good and improving. The overall progress results from good teaching and support throughout the school.
- RE makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development through an emphasis on exploring issues and questions about beliefs and values, and through experiential learning techniques which encourage reflection. As a result pupils are keen to learn, and behave well.

### Quality of teaching and learning of RE

The quality of teaching and learning in RE is good.

- All pupils benefit from enthusiastic, challenging and high quality teaching. They are supported by well-directed resources and a curriculum in which clear progression and continuity are designed to ensure that their learning develops quickly.

- Planning is a particular strength of RE, with lessons based on unusually clear and focused objectives, supported by activities which meet the different needs and learning styles of the full ability range.
- The department has made good progress in developing effective strategies to support assessment for learning, so that pupils have a good understanding of their own progress and work towards demanding targets. Homework is used to good effect by encouraging research and creative thinking.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in RE is good.

- The quality of the curriculum is a further strength of the subject. A careful and coherent balance between the subject's attainment targets is maintained at all levels of planning, so that pupils benefit from a curriculum which is interesting, relevant to their needs and intellectually demanding. As a result, pupils enjoy their learning and participate actively in lessons.
- The curriculum meets the statutory requirements of the subject, and provides a means of developing wider and more general skills, such as literacy.

### Leadership and management of RE

Leadership and management of the subject are outstanding.

- The subject leadership has set itself challenging targets for further development based on a clear self-evaluation. The teachers have a comprehensive understanding of the subject and how it should be taught. This in turn stimulates a sense of common purpose and direction within the department.
- The subject receives strong support from the senior leadership. This provides an environment in which the department is able to develop and flourish.

### Subject issue

- The department has benefited from further training to support development of the curriculum based on the guidance provided in the non-statutory national framework for RE. This is now incorporated

thoroughly and effectively in the planning, teaching and assessment of the subject.

## Inclusion

- All pupils are enabled to make good progress in their learning through the care, support and encouragement of their teachers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to develop assessment for learning as a means of more focused target setting
- developing further the use of a variety of questioning techniques to encourage greater awareness when dealing with sensitive issues
- increasing the range of strategies for differentiation in resource materials
- considering further opportunities for the enrichment of pupils' learning through the use of visitors.

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, SACRE and will be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Nick Green  
Her Majesty's Inspector