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15 December 2006

Mr Tittershill  
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Dear Mr Tittershill

Ofsted survey inspection programme – design and technology and modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the visits by Gina White HMI and Susan Wareing HMI to look at work in design and technology (D&T) and modern languages (ML) during the visit on 11-12 December. Thank you for your co-operation and hospitality towards our guest Susana Galvan, Director of Education and Training with the British Council, who shadowed the ML aspects of the visit.

The visits 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. As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the D&T visit had a particular focus on inclusion and the ML visit had a particular focus on progress to reaching the benchmarks for language take-up in Key Stage 4.

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 ML and D&T lessons.

### Design and Technology

The overall effectiveness of D&T was judged to be satisfactory.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

- Standards on entry in D&T are well above national averages and remain so by the end of each key stage. Most students do not continue to study design and technology beyond Key Stage 3. GCSE results in 2006 show that fewer students than expected achieved their targets and the proportion achieving grades A\* and A continued to be significantly lower than the school average. A relatively small number of students study AS Level and A Level courses in D&T. They achieve well and above national averages.
- Progress in the lessons observed was satisfactory. Students' use of tools and equipment, measurement and health and safety are good. However their use of research and product analysis and the use of computers to aid designing and manufacture are relatively under developed.
- Students' personal development is good. They have good attitudes and enjoy creating and making products. Older students say that what they learn in D&T is usefully preparing them for careers. Younger students have few opportunities to develop higher level thinking and team work skills to promote their economic well-being. Encouragement to take creative risks, develop enterprise and innovation are insufficiently promoted in D&T.

#### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in D&T is satisfactory overall.

- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of examination requirements, revision techniques and experience as moderators is used well to promote students attainment at Key Stage 4 and post 16. Good recall, listening skills and keenness to prepare and revise for tests underpin students' good attainment. Booklets, developed for each project, help students to organise their learning effectively and provide a useful aid to promote good study skills.
- Students find teacher demonstrations useful; in addition to practical demonstrations teachers model answers to examination questions, and explain their thoughts and reasoning. Teaching strategies are limited in scope and are characterised by often lengthy introductions and explanations.
- Too little attention is given in teachers' planning and in lessons to enable students in Years 7, 8 and 9 progressively to develop skills to design, plan and evaluate the products they make and to acquire and to use essential project management skills in investigation, research and decision making.

#### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the D&T curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum meets requirements but it is under review as some aspects of electronics, systems and control and opportunities to manufacture products using computers are very thinly covered. Staff training and

increasing access to computer resources is beginning to embed CAD in all key stages. However, knowledge and understanding of modern manufacturing methods, new technologies and the work of current designers is less evident in current projects at KS3 and KS4.

- The curriculum is enriched with visits and competitions. Opportunities to use them to provide a firmer linkage to classroom learning are at an early stage.

## Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of D&T are satisfactory.

- School review systems identify strengths and weaknesses in subject provision. Students are beginning to benefit from improvements to tackle longstanding issues of a lack of ICT provision. Systems to review the quality of teaching and learning and the use of assessment are developing.
- Marking and teachers' feedback to students is a strength in examination classes but this good practice is less firmly established or focused in Key Stage 3. Teachers are inconsistent in explaining what younger students need to do to improve and move their learning on.

## Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- All students irrespective of their ability, learning difficulties and ethnicity, follow the same teaching and learning programme but the analysis of the achievement of different groups in D&T is not undertaken.
- The intellectual challenge and vocational relevance of D&T are stronger in Years 10 to 13 but are insufficiently promoted in the subject overall.
- Support staff play an effective role in providing technical advice to students and in preparing resources; this helps to promote their progress in lessons.

## Areas for improvement

To improve provision further, the following points were discussed:

- ensure the programme of work at Key Stage 3 is balanced to enable students to develop and apply skills in using electronics, systems and control and to have opportunities to manufacture products using computers
- broaden teaching and learning strategies and ensure students' designing skills are more progressively developed in Key Stage 3 to promote more independent working in later key stages
- ensure all students know precisely what to do to improve their work.

## Modern Languages

The overall effectiveness of modern languages (ML) was judged to be satisfactory.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall.

- Standards in modern languages are good. They are well above average at all key stages, although performance at Key Stage 4 and post-16 in French dipped in 2006. Achievement is satisfactory when compared to students' starting points.
- Students' personal development is good. They have very good attitudes to language learning and understand its value in terms of pleasure and future employment. Behaviour in lessons is very good and relationships are very positive.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in modern languages is satisfactory overall.

- Teachers are all well qualified in the languages they teach. They are very competent speakers of the target language but there are missed opportunities to challenge the many very able students by extending its use.
- While there is much good practice which is worthy of sharing across the department, some lessons are dull and formulaic, with too few opportunities for students to use the language in pairs and groups.
- Some teachers do not systematically teach pronunciation and grammar in ways which motivate students.
- There are currently insufficient opportunities for the routine use of Information Communications Technology (ICT) in lessons, both by teachers and students.
- Marking does not always make clear how students might improve the quality of their work.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- ML benefits from a generous amount of curriculum time. All students study French and Spanish in Years 7 to 9 and can also opt for Latin in Years 8 and 9.

- All students must study at least one modern language in Years 10 and 11 and around 17 study two and some three.
- The most able students in French take GCSE in Year 10. Good use is then made of time in Year 11 to study another language or prepare for AS level in French.
- There is a good record of sixth formers opting for language study post-19.
- There is a good range of enrichment activities, including visits to France and a Spanish exchange which have a good take up.

### Leadership and management of the subject

Leadership and management of ML are satisfactory.

- Senior leaders are keen that languages should thrive and support languages through generous curriculum arrangements.
- Well-developed departmental review systems give the school detailed knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of modern languages.
- The department is clearly focused on raising achievement further but the pace of implementing improvements is sometimes slow.
- Students do not have regular access in language lessons to the use of ICT.

Subject issue: How close the school is to reaching the benchmarks for language take-up in Key Stage 4

All students are required to take at least one modern language up to the end of Year 11, with opportunities for more.

### The development of speaking skills

Students' standards in speaking are above average but their achievement could be even better.

- Students bring good personal skills to the study of modern languages. They respond to questions confidently and expect to produce extended answers.
- Their pronunciation and intonation is generally accurate but sometimes anglicised. Some teachers do not explicitly correct errors in a motivating way or provide enough opportunities for students to hear the language and use it in pairs and groups.

### Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- Students value the good personal and academic support they receive from their teachers.

- All students have the opportunity to study two modern languages at Key Stage 3 and at least one at Key Stage 4.
- More able students are challenged by early entry to French GCSE.

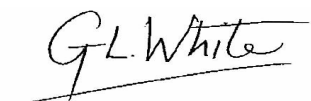
Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- share good practice systematically, especially in relation to developing more interactive and creative classroom activities
- improve the teaching of grammar and pronunciation for the purpose of meaningful communication
- widen access to the use of ICT to enhance language learning and independent learning.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, 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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G.L. White". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Gina White  
Her Majesty's Inspector