

24 January 2007

Mr Cornally
Headteacher
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Cheshire
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Dear Mr Cornally

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22-23 January 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. 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.

Overall Judgement

This is a very good department with outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in D&T are good.

- Students' standards of attainment are in line with national averages in resistant materials and graphics, but below in food technology and electronics, in Key Stage 4. Given the selective nature of the intake, this represents good to very good progress, and also good achievement given students' prior attainment on entering the school,
- Girls outperform boys in Key Stage 3 but in GCSE examinations the performance is more even. Boys perform better in Key Stage 4 than they do in schools nationally, especially in securing B and C grades in GCSE.

- Achievement is good across a wide spectrum of this subject although the more technical aspects of computer-aided designing (CAD) as well as computer-aided manufacturing (CAM) are not as well covered as is envisaged in the National Curriculum programme study for D&T.

Quality of teaching and learning in D&T

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

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge across the range of D&T, although technical aspects of CAD/CAM are underemphasised.
- The lessons seen were good overall with some outstanding features.
- Designing is well taught and teachers have a good understanding of how designers think and how best to encourage students to be creative. In food technology, the use of designing by drawing is rarely appropriate to the development of food products.
- The assessment and tracking of pupils' performance is excellent.
- Coursework and projects are exceptionally well managed throughout the department. Teachers use an effective range of methods to ensure that students perform well, though on some occasions craft techniques need to be more effectively taught.
- Some classes would benefit from specific and short periods of technician support when engaged in complex making procedures, allowing the class teacher to concentrate on supervising the whole class.
- Course planning is excellent.
- Discipline, class management and staff-student relationships are excellent and form a very solid foundation for high quality learning.
- Students are very positive about the quality of provision for D&T.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is well grounded in the school's overall policy for curriculum and its Catholic ethos. It is also well constructed to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and the GCSE course specifications.
- Courses are based on a good range of modern projects which the students find interesting and relevant. The project work is satisfactorily resourced and the learning resources are very well managed.

Leadership and management of D&T

The subject is outstandingly well led and managed.

- The senior management team ensures that D&T is very well supported within the school.
- The head of department provides excellent leadership and management characterised by very clear thinking and very effective and efficient ways of getting things done.

- Staff morale is very high. Staff are very professional in D&T and co-operate well together.
- D&T is presented to pupils as a thoroughly well organised set of subjects.
- Accommodation is very well organised and the departments' plans to upgrade them are entirely sensible
- Communications with parents are good.

Inclusion

The subject's contribution to the inclusion of students is good.

- Boys perform as well as girls in Key Stage 4. Although the situation has improved recently in Key Stage 3, girls still outperform boys.
- Students are given excellent and individualised guidance. This is based on very good assessment information and relationships between staff and students.
- Students with learning difficulties make good progress in D&T due to the very good individual attention they receive.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop provision for CAD/CAM
- review the practice of teaching in Food Technology, in the light of the March 2006 Ofsted report "Food Technology in Secondary Schools", (HMI 2633), to ensure that teaching is not held back by the use of inappropriate methods, for example, designing by drawing in food product development
- examine the deployment of technicians and learning support staff with a view to providing, where appropriate, short spells of support to those engaged in complex practical activities
- ensure that pupils in all classes are taught, and enabled to practise, the most efficient and effective use of hand tools.

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

Peter Toft
Her Majesty's Inspector