

07 February 2007

Mr Walters
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Dear Mr Walters

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 their visits on 5-7 February.

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 in D&T are good overall.

- Standards on entry are above national averages and remain so by the end of Key Stage 4. Achievement is good: GCSE results in 2006 show that most pupils achieved their targets and they did well in textiles and resistant materials compared to their attainment in other subjects.

- Standards are broadly satisfactory at Key Stage 3. Pupils listen attentively and follow instructions well but have few opportunities to plan their work, or to regularly test the products they make because the tasks and activities are too narrowly focussed. Consequently such skills are under developed and teacher's assessments at the higher levels are insecure.
- Progress in the lessons observed was broadly satisfactory. In both Key Stages pupils develop good use of tools and equipment, measurement and health and safety. However, their awareness of designers and industrial practice and their use of computers to aid designing and manufacture are weaker.
- Pupils' personal development is good. Their behaviour and attitudes in D&T are good and they enjoy and they are confident in making products. Most pupils continue to study design and technology beyond Key Stage 3.
- Older pupils say that what they learn in D&T is usefully preparing them for life. The importance of healthy diet and nutrition are well promoted in food technology; pupils say that they use the recipes and apply the cooking skills they are learning in their homes. Younger pupils have few opportunities to develop problem solving, decision making and planning 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' specialist knowledge of examination requirements and their very detailed advice, guidance and support of all learners underpins the high attainment and achievement at Key Stage 4. Pupils value this and the small group sizes. They say that advice and guidance is particularly strong in D&T compared to their other GCSE courses.
- Teacher and pupil relationships are friendly and supportive and lessons are well resourced; for example good use of computer animations helped pupils to understand different types of mechanical motion.
- A weaker feature of teaching was a lack of challenge to push more able pupils' learning on or to tailor tasks to promote learners understanding of complex concepts and designing skills.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the D&T curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum broadly meets requirements and recent modification has strengthened opportunities for pupils to develop knowledge and understanding of electronics, systems and control. Opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of what good design is and how to manufacture using computers are thinly covered in current projects.
- Too little attention is given in the Key Stage 3 course to enable pupils to progressively develop skills to design, plan and test the products they make and to acquire and to use essential project management skills in

investigation, research and decision making. Consequently both pupils and teachers have to work even harder to cover these key D&T skills in GCSE courses.

Leadership and management of the subject

Leadership and management of D&T are satisfactory.

- Self-evaluation broadly identifies strengths and weaknesses in the subject. Systems to enable leaders and managers to keep the quality of teaching and learning in D&T under review have yet to be established.
- Both of the new joint heads of department are beginning to tackle the immediate issues of modifying parts of the curriculum to meet requirements at both key stages.
- Teachers know the projects they are teaching well, but further work to plan collaboratively in D&T and to develop their understanding of progression might usefully be employed to improve lesson planning and the accuracy of assessment.
- Marking and teachers' feedback to pupils 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 pupils need to do to improve and move their learning on.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- All pupils 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.
- Polish pupils, at an early stage of acquiring English, are well supported in D&T. The emphasis on using practical demonstrations, recipe cards and booklets helps to engage them in lessons and aid their learning. Despite no previous experience of the subject these pupils have settled well to their new courses and enjoy them.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed include:

- ensure pupils' designing skills are more progressively developed in Key Stage 3 to promote more independent working in later key stages
- ensure the programme of work is balanced to enable pupils to develop understanding of designers and industry and to extend and improve their skills in using CAD and CAM
- tailor teaching and learning strategies to ensure all pupils are challenged and supported in lessons and that they know precisely what to do to improve their work to reach the next level.

Modern languages

The overall effectiveness of modern languages was judged to be good

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good overall.

- Pupils enter the school with prior attainment that is above average.
- Results of teacher assessment in modern languages were well above average at Key Stage 3.
- In 2006 results at grades A*-C and A*-A were well above average in French. In GCSE German, which only the most able pupils study, three of the five candidates entered gained grades A*-A.
- All pupils who entered a GCSE examination in modern languages achieved a qualification. This represents good progress.
- In lessons seen pupils generally made good progress in both key stages. They generally speak confidently with accurate intonation and pronunciation, although less able pupils have more anglicised pronunciation.
- In writing pupils show good understanding of the patterns of the language and apply them successfully.
- Some middle and lower attaining pupils at Key Stage 4 depend too much on written notes and set phrases.
- Working relationships between teachers and pupils are very strong.
- Pupils of all abilities are very well motivated, behave very well and bring very positive attitudes to language learning.

Quality of teaching and learning of modern languages

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, particularly about examination requirements.
- In most lessons teachers make clear, well-sequenced presentations of new language.
- Interactive whiteboards are well used to engage pupils. However pupils do not have regular opportunities in lessons to use ICT personally to consolidate and extend their learning.
- Teachers work hard in lessons to support pupils but information about pupils' progress is not always effectively used in lesson planning to focus on pupils' individual needs or inform them of the next steps in their learning.
- There is very good practice within the department which challenges pupils' thinking and creates a sense of real purpose and fun. There is scope to extend this very good practice across the department.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- Almost all pupils learn French from Year 7 and the most able pupils also learn German in Years 8 and 9.
- All pupils are required to study at least one modern language until the end of Year 11 and the department has put in place suitable alternative courses for those pupils for whom GCSE is not appropriate.
- Currently not all pupils in Year 10 have the opportunity to study German. The school has recognised the need to improve this provision next year and to extend opportunities to study a wider range of languages.
- Extra curricular provision is good. There are well established and popular study visits and exchanges to France and Germany. Language days offer tasters of other languages and promote cultural awareness.
- Pupils benefit from regular contact with native speakers of French and German. There is also good support for the increasing number of pupils who have Polish as a first language.
- Catch-up lessons are provided outside the school day for new pupils who have not previously studied the languages that the school offers.

Leadership and management of modern languages

Leadership and management are good.

- The subject leader has established a culture in which language learning is valued and this is well supported by the caring ethos of the school.
- Pupils are convinced that they can learn languages well.
- You support the subject leader with good resources and promote languages enthusiastically within the school.
- Self-evaluation is at an early stage at departmental level.
- Teachers have access to a good range of information about pupils. They are beginning to use it in planning and marking but pupils are not always aware of how well they are achieving or how to improve
- Pupils are not yet fully involved in tracking their own progress or planning next steps.

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

- The school has exceeded the benchmarks as almost all pupils study at least one language to the end of Year 11.

The development of speaking skills

Pupils' speaking skills are well-developed.

- They generally have accurate pronunciation. They can respond accurately and promptly to direct questions in familiar contexts with varying degrees of support. They are well prepared for speaking tests throughout school.
- By Year 11 pupils have a good range of language and structures.
- There is more scope to use the language spontaneously in informal situations in lessons as well as for practice.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- The school offers a caring and supportive environment where individuals feel valued. This is exemplified by very good support offered to pupils new to the school and the country.
- The languages curriculum is very inclusive.
- Most pupils study at least one language throughout their school career. Almost all pupils leave school with a qualification in a modern language. This leads to very positive attitudes to learning languages.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that middle and lower ability pupils achieve as well as they can
- using assessment information more effectively so that pupils understand how well they are doing and how to improve
- increasing opportunities for pupils to work more independently including through regular personal use of ICT.

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

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector