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Mr R Thomas
Headteacher
The Bromfords School
Grange Avenue
Wickford
Essex
SS12 OLZ

Dear Mr Thomas

Ofsted survey inspection programme – design and technology and citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my joint visit with Tony Gallagher HMI on 6 March 2007 to look at work in design and technology and citizenship.

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 good.

Achievement and Standards

Achievement and standards in design and technology are good.

- For the last three years all pupils have been entered for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) a year early, as a result,

they complete their Key Stage 3 design and technology course at the end of Year 8. Last year, at the end of Year 8, results were above the national average achieved by pupils at the end of year 9; eight out of every ten pupils attained Level 5 or above with just under a quarter gaining Level 6.

- The proportion of pupils achieving A*- C grades in the GCSE at the end of Year 10 was close to the national average that is normally achieved at the end of Year 11, though few achieved A*-A. A number of pupils will retake the examination this year and the quality of their current work indicates that the results they should attain will raise the proportion of A*- C grades to above the national average.
- The standards seen during the inspection in both Key Stage 3 and 4 were above average. Pupils' performance is on an upward trend.
- In respect to their starting points on entry to the school, pupils' progress and achievement are good. In both key stages, their designing is effective, they demonstrate a secure knowledge and understanding of manufacturing techniques and they create well-made products.
- Pupils' capability in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the subject is less well developed, particularly their use of computer aided design and computer aided manufacture (CAD/CAM) in Key Stage 3.
- Sixth form pupils' standards in advanced level design and technology courses are below the national average. However, in respect of their attainment on entry to the sixth form their progress and achievement are satisfactory.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in design and technology are good.

- Teachers plan and prepare their lessons well. They identify clear learning objectives and outcomes. Lessons contain a good balance of teacher exposition and pupil tasks. Resources are chosen and used well. Pupils are given clear explanations and instructions, and teachers generally use questioning effectively to check and develop pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- A good working relationship is evident between pupils and teachers in all lessons. A strength of teaching and learning in Key Stage 3 is the comprehensive and well-devised guidance and support pupils receive which steers them effectively through unit of work requirements.
- However, teaching and learning in resistant materials are not as consistently good as they are in the other areas of the subject. Also, the composition of some sixth form groups, in which there are pupils working at significantly different stages of both AS and A2 courses makes it difficult for teachers to meet fully the needs of all pupils.

- The quality of assessment in design and technology is good. Well devised monitoring, recording and target setting procedures are generally implemented effectively. The use of assessment for learning is embedded in all aspects of the subject in all key stages including a helpful diagnostic unit of work in Year 7.
- Assessment provides pupils with a clear picture of their progress and achievements and what they need to do to improve. In discussions, all pupils were aware of their current and target levels and grades and they knew which aspects of their design and technology capability they had to improve. However, pupils identified some inconsistency in the guidance they are given and in the targets they are set across the specialist areas in Key Stage 4.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in design and technology is good.

- In Years 7-8 a suitably balanced curriculum is provided that meets most of the requirements of the National Curriculum for the subject. The scheme of work is planned effectively and is sufficiently detailed to provide staff with clear guidance on how to deliver it.
- The use of themes and well produced project booklets for each unit of work provides coherence and progression in pupils' learning. Units of work are reviewed and revised regularly to meet the needs and interests of pupils. They see the relevance of the design tasks they are set and are enthusiastic about the products they make.
- However, the carousel model of delivery of the Key Stage 3 curriculum reduces continuity and progression in pupils' learning and there are currently few strategies employed to address this. Coverage of CAD/CAM is limited.
- The curriculum plans for GCSE courses are effective and provide clear frameworks for meeting examination requirements. However, the school does not yet offer any vocational/applied GCSEs for pupils who might prefer more work-related courses in the subject area.
- The school provides a wide range of in-school and external activities for pupils to enrich the design and technology curriculum. To ease their transition into secondary design and technology work, valuable design and technology days are provided for the primary school pupils who will be attending the school. However, there are no bridging units of work for Year 6 pupils to enable them to prepare more thoroughly for this.

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management of design and technology are good.

- The head of department has a good understanding of the nature and purpose of design and technology education. She has a clear vision for the subject and high expectations of staff and pupils. She leads by example in her planning and teaching which models good practice. Under her leadership, schemes of work and assessment procedures have been improved and the guidance and support needed by pupils to make good progress have been identified. Resources and accommodation are managed well to create a productive working environment.
- The head of department's thorough monitoring of the performance of design and technology leads to accurate self-evaluation of the quality of provision. The department development plan is effectively structured and focuses on the key areas for improvement. The challenge of entering all pupils early for the GCSE and the limits this puts on raising all pupils' attainment has been recognised. The decision this year to place only the most able of the cohort on this fast track is wise.
- There is scope for the head of department's use of data analysis to be extended further to enable her to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how to measure pupils' progress and achievements.

Inclusion

- All groups of pupils enjoy and achieve well in design and technology; this reflects the good level of support and guidance they receive. Boys' achievement is below that of girls but improving. This is partly a result of the positive impact of the assessment for learning strategies used in the subject.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities have full access to the design and technology curriculum and they generally achieve well. Good opportunities for stretching the most able pupils are provided by the fast track GCSE early entry scheme and through starting advanced level courses a year early.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teaching and learning and pupils' achievement are as consistently good in resistant materials as they are in the other areas of the subject
- developing strategies to enhance pupils' performance in advanced level courses
- achieving more consistency across the specialist areas in Key Stage 4 in the guidance given to pupils and in the targets they are set
- providing more continuity and progression in pupils' learning and increasing the coverage of CAD/CAM in Key Stage 3

- extending the use of data analysis to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how to measure pupils' progress and achievements in the subject.

Citizenship

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be satisfactory, with some good features.

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement in citizenship is good in those aspects they have studied in depth.

- In many instances, students formulated their own views based upon discussion, debate and research. Higher attaining students confidently applied key terms and concepts and related well to the issues being considered.
- Fruitful links between citizenship and drama enabled students to develop knowledge and empathy about human rights. Students in religious education assertively expressed their views on abortion but readily listened to others and sought factual clarification from the teacher when needed.
- Weaknesses in achievement included a failure to grasp the personal relevance of topics, particularly on the part of lower attaining students.
- Members of the school council achieve well. They are convincing in how well they represent the views of others and can point to specific examples where they have influenced decisions. Less confident and communicative students have benefited from membership over time. Older members readily take on responsible roles through peer mentoring. They gain much from these activities and younger students readily turn to their older peers for support.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in citizenship is satisfactory.

- Most subject teachers are able to embrace citizenship within their broader subject areas with some very good examples in drama and in the Year 7 'Innovates' programme.
- There are good teacher-led initiatives to augment the subject specific experience which exists in the school.
- The most effective teaching introduced and reinforced key concepts on which students could build, for instance links between slavery, economics and human rights.

- Weaknesses included a lack of topicality in some lessons and teachers setting overly elaborate tasks and attempting to cover too much ground too quickly.
- ICT is reasonably well applied and some good learning materials are being developed.
- Limited progress has made in terms of assessment. Managers rightly identity this as a priority and capacity exists among teaching staff to address this shortcoming.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in citizenship is satisfactory.

- Citizenship has good visibility within the school but has yet to establish coherence and distinctiveness in fully addressing the programme of study.
- A standard approach has been applied to auditing citizenship across subjects. This represents a good and logical starting point but a wide variety of interpretations have been applied to the audits and too few give recognition to the interdependency of the three key strands of citizenship.
- Staff are insufficiently exploiting what young people learn from their involvement in groups such as the school council, 'student voice' or other external community activities. Potentially, such activities support the 'participation and responsible action' aspect well.
- The Year 7 'Innovations' programme lends itself very well to citizenship's skills development. It is well received by students and lesson planning accommodates elements of the citizenship programme well.
- Lesson planning is satisfactory overall and in some cases good.

Leadership and management of citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- There is good support from school managers and the school has made an obvious commitment to citizenship through the appointment of a co-ordinator.
- The co-ordinator has made good progress in a short time in terms of the quality of teaching and learning, resources and subject visibility. She is actively involved in professional development and works well with other staff.
- The subject self assessment is largely accurate if slightly optimistic in a few areas. The weaknesses identified within it are accurate.

- Managers are prepared to make strategic decisions in relation to the delivery of the curriculum and have addressed past parental concerns about the teaching of citizenship and allied subjects.
- There is good capacity for further improvement.

Subject issue: provision for teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

- Overall, the citizenship programme takes good account of diversity. Opportunities to explore attitudes and values on contemporary cultural and social issues were seized by teachers albeit only in the better sessions. Matters very relevant to the local area were tackled well by Year 7 students whilst considering the arguments for and against the expansion of Stansted airport. Tensions surrounding socio-economic aspects of the proposals sparked topical debate about class, wealth, and employment. Students gained a good and critical analysis of how the media chooses to present controversial issues.

Inclusion

- Lessons are planned to meet the needs of higher attaining students as well as those with special educational needs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing all aspects of assessment
- building on the existing departmental audits to enable teachers to better apply the key aspects of citizenship
- the need for ongoing support from school managers to ensure that citizenship is embedded across the key host subjects
- improving learning materials.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop design and technology and citizenship in the school.

A copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Nick Green
Her Majesty's Inspector