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Mr Doherty
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Doherty

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14 June 2007 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 four lessons.

Design and Technology

The overall effectiveness of design and technology was judged to be good with some outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

Pupils enter the school with standards in D&T which are broadly in line with national expectations. Pupils make good progress in the subject.

- The school has identified the need to improve pupils' basic skills and this has led to a whole school focus on writing. Pupils are encouraged to apply the skills they have learnt in their literacy lessons when writing in D&T. As a result pupils express themselves clearly in their planning, use technical words accurately and can explain how they made a product.

- Differentiation is effectively planned to support a wide range of strategies which are carefully matched to the needs of pupils. Thus pupils are supported and challenged. Teaching assistants are deployed well and provision for pupils who are not first language English speakers is good. As a result all pupils make good progress. There is no difference in the progress of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD), those who are not first language English speakers or between boys and girls.
- Pupils' designing capabilities are good. This is helped by the use of booklets to lead them through designing. This enables pupils to understand the next steps to take and to build on experience from previous work. Pupils are able to plan their work and consider the use of an increasingly wide range of materials.
- All work is neat and well presented.
- High standards of making are strived for. Pupils know the importance of accuracy in making and that their work must be fit for purpose.
- Older pupils have begun to use design criteria but this skill is insufficiently developed to enable them to evaluate their product and to promote their critical thinking.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning in design and technology is good with some outstanding features.

- All pupils were enthusiastic about D&T and said it was fun. They liked to use their 'full imaginations, get messy and make things'. Pupils are very confident in talking about their work, why they made things and who will use them. Many can explain how they would change things if they made them again. They are encouraged to make, and do make, very individual products. In the lesson on vehicles pupils chose to make a wide variety of vehicles, ranging from an ice cream van to a coach to carry holiday makers.
- All pupils were able to bring in aspects of their home cultures. In a packaging lesson Hindu pupils used good luck symbols from the Hindu religion to decorate their work. They are proud to use these and the school draws on the rich cultural diversity of pupil backgrounds to enhance the learning of all.
- Teaching is at least good and some aspects are outstanding. In particular pupils are encouraged to be independent learners. In one lesson Year 6 pupils set their own aims for the lesson and they evaluated whether they had met them at the end. Two boys had carried out an experiment into the effectiveness of solar energy. They presented their findings to the whole class which helped other pupils to decide on the best energy source to use in their buggy designs.

- Focused practical tasks are well planned and help pupils to extend their knowledge of materials and their properties. This is then reflected in their design work and making. Interactive white boards are used imaginatively. In one class a pupil's planning was presented on the board to illustrate what was expected and to set a high standard of work for the class. An animated sequence for a vehicle clearly showed how the axles worked to remind pupils of work they had done earlier and needed to think about as they designed their vehicle.
- Teaching in reception gives pupils a good grounding in D&T. Health and safety are effectively taught and reinforced throughout the school. Thus pupils are clear about how to identify and avoid hazards.
- Tracking of pupils is thorough and as a result all teachers know what sub level of the National curriculum each pupil is working towards. This is reflected in teachers' planning. This has helped them to set high expectations and to plan challenging work. Marking is regular and positive but it does not always explain what pupils can do to improve further.
- Questioning is used well in all classes. It is used to challenge pupils and to encourage them to explain their thinking. Thus teachers were clear about pupils' starting points and so were able to help pupils to consolidate and extend learning in the new tasks.

Quality of curriculum

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

- A broad and balanced D&T curriculum is provided. The school appropriately uses a range of published syllabuses including those from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and Design and Technology Association and has begun to choose the best for its pupils. The school is piloting a new curriculum which emphasises sustainability from the Centre for Research in Primary Technology. This has captured the interest of both teachers and pupils alike. The school is a member of a Creative Partnership. This has enabled teachers to expand their understanding of how to promote creativity in pupils' work in D&T and across the curriculum. A small group of pupils in Years 5 and 6 have designed and researched the building of a school wildlife pond which they would like to situate near to the school allotment. This has involved a wide range of cross curricular links and given the pupils a great sense of purpose.
- Teachers are able to plan when they teach D&T either in blocks of time or over several weeks. This has allowed them to make best use of cross curricular links and has boosted progression across the key stages. For example pupils practise their making skills in more than one subject and this has improved the accuracy and care with which they use small hand tools.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of design and technology are outstanding.

- The subject coordinator is highly motivated to improve the quality of pupils' experiences in D&T. Although he is part time (0.5) in school and also manages information technology (ICT) he has worked effectively to drive up standards in D&T. He is an effective ambassador for the subject both inside and outside the school. He is active nationally, both in writing schemes of work and contributing to thinking and challenge in D&T. His vision for the subject is based on a thorough knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. He has excellent subject knowledge and is a good model for teaching in D&T. Because of this he has raised the profile of D&T in the school.
- Your support to D&T is invaluable in choosing staff with an enthusiasm for the subject and allowing them to develop their vision. This underpins the improvements in the subject and the drive to increase creativity in the school.

Inclusion

- There is no difference in the overall achievement of boys and girls. Those pupils with learning disabilities and or difficulties make good progress. This is because of the wide range of differentiation used to support and challenge all pupils. Teaching assistants are deployed well with individuals and small groups of pupils. Additional support for pupils with English as a Foreign Language has ensured that pupils' home language is valued and discussion in small groups in their home language supports their understanding of the subject. Pupils from minority ethnic groups are confident to bring their cultural heritage into school and share and celebrate it with others. Thus all pupils' prior knowledge and experience is used effectively to help them make good progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- use specifications when designing to challenge pupils further when making evaluations
- ensure that feedback to pupils helps them improve further.

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

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

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector