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Mr D Boyle
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Boyle

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on the 16-17 October 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 nine students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

Design and Technology

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in D&T are low.

- Standards of GCSE results over the past few years have been somewhat below national average. Fewer students enter for GCSE examinations than the specialist school's target requires. In the 2007 GCSE examination, students did less well in Design and Technology than they did in most other subjects they studied, so their achievement and attainment were both unsatisfactory. There was a similar picture in AS level Textiles where there was an absence of the highest grades.
- In lessons in Years 10 and 11 students are generally making satisfactory progress and the standard of coursework is improving. In AS level Textiles (which is run in conjunction with other local sixth forms) design

work was strong but the theoretical underpinning was less well developed, limiting overall standards.

- At the end of Key Stage 3 students' attainment in design and technology is lower than in many similar schools. This is because they have not covered all of the National Curriculum programmes of study as required so their attainment and their achievement are not high enough.
- The inconsistent staffing and the absence of appropriate resources mean that students do not get the benefit of some of the more interesting and up-to-date areas that they should cover. Students do not have sufficient experience of making their own designs and too much of their work is overly teacher directed. In consequence students are insufficiently taking responsibility for their own work and their own ideas. However, students generally enjoy their design and technology lessons. They enter the school often with only limited experience of design and technology and then make steady progress in Years 7 to 9.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning is broadly satisfactory.

- The standard of teaching varies from excellent to unsatisfactory. Broadly standards of teaching are satisfactory. In the best lessons teachers have a close rapport with their students which enables them to both provide challenging learning opportunities while supporting them individually very effectively, so that all make very good progress. In the satisfactory lessons students enjoy their work, make satisfactory progress, and teachers ensure students keep on task and behave appropriately.
- The less successful lessons are insufficiently organised and do not consistently challenge and excite students, or enable them to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Many teachers give freely of their time as they encourage students to return at break time or after school to get additional guidance and support. With lower attaining groups, teaching assistants work very effectively with teachers to form a partnership that allows students, particularly those with statements of special educational needs, to make the same progress as the rest of the group.
- Assessment for learning is in an early stage of development so that students do not regularly receive accurate feedback. The school has not properly finalised a system that records the coverage of the National Curriculum and the levels that students achieve cumulatively as they move from module to module and subject to subject.
- As a result information from different teachers of design and technology is not well joined together to form a good overview of what students know, understand, and can do. Currently, formal assessment is unsatisfactory but a start has been made in improving the way it is collected, and used, to inform teaching and learner.
- Project work is sometimes insufficiently structured. The new strategy ensures that each section of the project is given a completion date, work

is called in regularly for assessment which staff mark, and then targets are set for its improvement. Work is again reviewed to ensure further progress. This is starting to raise standards.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of curriculum is unsatisfactory

- At Key Stage 3, the amount of time for the subject is broadly in line with most similar schools, although the limited range of specialist staff available has restricted the range of specialisms studied. This reduces the opportunities for developing the full range of knowledge, understanding and skills as laid down in the National Curriculum. The statutory requirements are not met because structures, systems and control, computer aided design and manufacture, and smart materials are not studied sufficiently.
- ICT is not used regularly as an integral part of design and technology lessons restricting coverage of areas like research and computer aided design and manufacture which students should develop. Students are able to study and produce a good range of food and textile products in line with the national recommendation.
- At Key Stage 4, students are offered a good range of courses in food studies, graphic products, textiles and resistant materials. Students start the course from a lower base compared with most other schools.
- Students enjoy design and technology, and particularly making things. Lower attaining students and those who need particular help are well supported by their teaching assistants. The Director of Learning Support considers some of the practice adopted within the department a model for the school. Students respect each other's work. They acknowledge the progress and contribution each makes to the lessons. They work well together in pairs and teams, listening to each other and respecting others backgrounds and cultures. This encourages racial harmony and understanding.

Leadership and management of D&T

At whole school level leadership of D&T is unsatisfactory but at departmental level management is broadly satisfactory.

- The school has made efforts to recruit and develop its staff to be suitably trained and qualified. It has made progress in this matter. At the time of this visit there was a substantive head of department, a food specialist, but no other member of staff with subject responsibility as the second in department was on maternity leave.
- There were two overseas trained staff, one of whom was moving towards Qualified Teacher Status. The school is reviewing its management structure as part of its work force review, but the extended period of uncertainty has sapped morale. What makes the department

more difficult to lead and manage is the split site with staff on both sites. In addition, the rooms are not close enough together and this reduces the effectiveness of co-operation and support. This should be reviewed.

- Strategic planning is under developed and resources for teaching and learning are limited. Recently introduced line management is supporting development but further planning is necessary to enable the department to work more closely together; provide appropriate quality up to date resources; integrate fully ICT into the department's work; and develop fully effective assessment procedures. All of these are required to enable students to benefit from a modern and relevant curriculum.

Inclusion

Students who need additional help and lower attainers work well with their teachers and the teaching assistants to make suitable progress. In every class students get on well and work with each other willingly regardless of their ethnicity and background.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the quality of management, teaching and learning are more consistently effective across the subject, building on the best practice to raise standards across both key stages and in the sixth form
- developing the curriculum to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum so that students are engaged in design and make products suitable for the 21st Century, knowing how well they are progressing and how to get better
- providing suitable staffing and resources, including: modern and smart materials; ICT, including computer aided design and manufacture; systems and control equipment so that students' experience of design and technology is as expected in the National Curriculum.

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

Andrew Lyons
Additional Inspector