

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 40 40 40
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs J Strong
Acting Headteacher
St Catherine's Roman Catholic School for Girls
Watling Street
Bexleyheath
DA6 7QJ

Dear Mrs Strong

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 30-31 October 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 satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

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

- Standards in the GCSE examination vary year on year and from subject to subject. Last year in Food 22 students were entered, all passed doing better than anticipated and their results overall were in line with national averages for the number gaining an A* to C grade.
- In textiles, 26 students were entered and all passed. The number gaining A* to C grades was well above the national average with a substantial number reaching the highest grades.

- In graphics, 19 students were entered and all gained a grade. These students did less well than their targets predicted and the number gaining A* to C grades was well below the national average.
- In the earlier years, students study with equal time food, textiles, and graphics with resistant materials and control technology.
- Standards are high in food and textiles but lower in the other areas because students do not spend long enough to learn all the skills they need and to cover the National Curriculum in full depth.
- Attainment at entry is quite variable in D&T and often below expectation. Progress thereafter is generally satisfactory and often good. However, students who follow the graphics course in Years 10 and 11 have not had all the experiences at sufficient depth to make a really good start, and they have to catch up to do as well as they are capable.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

Teaching varies from unsatisfactory to good, being broadly satisfactory overall.

- The restrictions of the accommodation limit the effectiveness of some teaching with large numbers of students crammed into a too small space. They are not able to see the teacher without turning round or craning their necks. In other lessons, the absence of specialist accommodation, for example in graphics, together with poor resources restricts the quality of teaching and learning.
- Often in lessons there is a good partnership between teachers and teaching assistants who support the lower attainers and those who hold statements of special education need. Their joint endeavour means that these students often make good progress. The food technician plays a very active part in lessons, enabling them to progress with pace and challenge, by bringing out materials for students to use and clearing away quietly and efficiently afterwards.
- Teachers are committed to the students. They work hard to support them and give extra time to ensure that they make the progress of which they are capable. Some teachers are not specialists in the areas they are required to teach and they have to be guided by managers and spend time gaining the expertise they need. This means the overall effectiveness of the management of the department, and of teaching and learning, is dissipated.
- Assessment is built effectively into courses in the first three years although the outcomes vary depending on the subject followed and the staff who are teaching. Students are encouraged to take their work home and have it evaluated by their family and friends. In school, students are encouraged to review each other's work with the aim of all making their work better and raising its standards. In the GCSE classes, assessment is too variable depending on the subject followed. The best practice of regular and rigorous evaluation of coursework is not universally applied and this impacts on the overall standard that students are awarded in their GCSE examination.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory overall.

- The curriculum broadly meets the requirements of the National Curriculum but students get too little experience of working in resistant materials, graphics and electronics.
- Students are able to study and produce a good range of food and textile products in line with the national recommendation. The time allocated to D&T allows the subject to be well explored but the balance between the different contributory areas, food, textiles, resistant materials, graphics, control technology and structures does not allow all the components to be taught as they should.
- In addition, ICT is in short supply and insufficiently incorporated into the life of the department because of a lack of resources. The basic communication skills of drawing and sketching are underdeveloped. This restricts progress because students cannot express themselves quickly and efficiently.
- Students should be able to use ICT regularly in their D&T work as both the National Curriculum and GCSE specifications require. For their coursework, students have to return after school and at lunch times to gain access to the school's ICT equipment. Teachers have to make this provision available and so give generously of their time.

Leadership and management of D&T

The leadership provided by the senior staff and governors is unsatisfactory but the day-to-day running of the department is satisfactory.

- At the time of this visit the substantive Head of Department was on maternity leave and the specialist food teacher was leading the department. This was done with effective organisation. The good quality self-evaluation gives the department clear direction. At whole school and governance level, there is still much to do because the provision of accommodation, equipment and resources are inadequate to provide an acceptable quality of education.
- Although the department is fully staffed for the accommodation that it has, there have been difficulties in recruiting suitably trained and qualified staff to match the needs of the curriculum. Staff have been appointed without the necessary expertise of the material areas in which they have had to teach and they have had to rely on managers to support their preparation of appropriate lessons. There is only one graphics and resistant materials teacher and accommodation is limited restricting the curriculum offer. This needs urgent attention. The room that was designed for teaching both food and textiles has been found to be unsatisfactory after a school Health and Safety risk analysis. It needs

urgent replacement or refurbishment to meet the planned curriculum need.

- The resources for teaching and learning need upgrading. There is no hand-washing sink in the food technology room as is required by hygiene regulations. There are insufficient resources in the department, and in the school, for ICT to take its proper place in D&T as was envisaged in the National Curriculum and the GCSE specifications. A more creative approach needs to be taken so that computers have a real place in D&T: a class set of laptop computers could be an appropriate strategy.

Inclusion

Low attaining students and students with special needs have good provision in their lessons and are well supported by learning supports assistants working with the class teacher.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising the quality of teaching to the best by bring more rigour to all the lessons, ensuring that all teachers have the necessary training and skills to be fully effective, and using assessment more effectively to raise standards to the highest levels
- utilising the time given in Key Stage 3 more effectively to cover the programme of study more efficiently to raise standards
- improving the quality of resources, and particularly accommodation and provision for ICT, so that students in all lessons benefit from a quality educational experience.

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