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Mrs P Cox
Headteacher
The Tiffin Girls' School
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Dear Mrs Cox

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme:
Design & Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14-15 January 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of five lessons.

Design and Technology

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

Achievement and standards

Students' attainment in last year's GCSE short course in Graphic Products was truly outstanding. GCSE, AS and A2 results year on year are excellent. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is very good and all students make at least very good progress.

- Last year in short course GCSE Graphic Products 32 candidates were entered for the examination, 20 gained A* grades and the other 12 A grades. Tiffin girls gained 83% of all the A* grades awarded by the examination awarding body.
- The entry to GCSE examinations varies year on year depending on

the number of students wishing to follow the subject to examination level. Both Graphic Products and Resistant Materials are offered and results for both these subjects have been extremely high. In the last three years the number of students gaining A and A* grades has moved from 71% to 100%, a remarkable improvement.

- In most years some students continue to AS level and results here too are excellent. The number of A and B grades awarded being in the region of 70%, and all candidates gain an appropriately high grade. This is even more remarkable as some of the candidates did not study the subject in years 10 and 11 and have to catch up in year 12. Progress then is most often excellent. Last year five candidates followed the A2 course with three of them gaining an A grade, one a B grade, the other a C. Again, these results were excellent.
- At Key Stage 3, students have experience of designing and making products in resistant materials, textiles and graphic products. There is a good theoretical underpinning for the work, and students use ICT, particularly 'ProDesktop', a computer aided design (CAD) package, in a most professional way to support their designing. Students have a good understanding of structures, which is being fostered by a good practical project in which students make a framework using recycled writing paper, which is then tested and evaluated. There is a very wide range of prior attainment in D&T from students' experience in their primary schools. The teachers are every effective in ensuring all students can learn effectively so that everyone makes very good and often excellent progress. Standards are very high.
- Students are able to study and produce a satisfactory range of textile products in line with the national recommendation but as the school has no accommodation for food, the recommendations here are not met.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

Overall the quality of teaching and learning is very good.

- There is only one full time member of staff in the department as head of department, one experienced part time teacher and an art teacher who is a specialist in textiles who teaches a textiles project in Year 8. Together they form a formidable team whose standard of teaching is very good. Some outstanding teaching was seen.
- Teachers are very well organised, have an excellent understanding of both the content of their subject and of how to teach it so that students can excel. Suitably challenging tasks are set for students and these match their prior attainment well. All lessons proceed with a great pace which students readily accept. Students enjoy learning because the lessons are rigorous, challenging and enjoyable. The management of students is very secure. Attendance is outstanding.
- Relationships are a strength. Behaviour is exemplary. All students get along well together. In group work, they quickly organise themselves so that tasks are well managed and all work hard to the common

end.

- The electronic white board is well used and high quality learning resources, prepared by the teachers, match the needs of the students and set standards for students to emulate.
- ICT is effectively used in coursework and presentation is outstanding. Homework is set regularly.
- The students' National Curriculum level is reported at the end of Year 9. The school uses its own system to identify students' progress on a regular basis. Students regularly complete their own evaluation of their work and set targets for improvements. This is done at the end of each module in Key Stage 3. Teachers are very good at sharing strategies with students so that can improve their work, and these are applied immediately so that excellent progress is assured. However all this information is not collected as systematically as it could be and so is not readily available for use.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good overall.

- The time given to D&T in the first three years is less than in most schools. However, the time is very well used and students follow a modular course in conjunction with art. A series of modules covers graphic products, the production of products in resistant materials, wood, plastics (and less regularly in metal) and textiles. These are supported by very good use of CAD and computer aided manufacturing (CAM) and a strong underpinning of principles, particularly in structures and mechanical systems. The only weaknesses are that students develop a limited expertise in the use of modern and 'Smart' materials, and in food technology. In addition, although electronic control systems are taught in ICT, they are not included in design and making projects. This would require more time for it to be included into the curriculum.
- The projects that teachers have designed are interesting and exciting. They often include features from other subject areas, particularly art. For example, in Year 8 students develop their ICT skills in CAD and using the work of a chosen artist, they develop a logo and make a model of a themed café together with products that could be used there, like menu cards and take-out bags.
- At Key Stage 4, students are given a satisfactory choice of GCSE courses in Resistant Materials and Graphic Products which run depending on demand. Students on the courses speak well of their experiences.
- In the sixth form, AS level D&T is offered and runs according to take up. In Year 13 increasing numbers of students continue to A2 level despite the pressure there is on reducing the number of subjects they follow. The school is actively encouraging D&T to be seen as a subject that is linked to creative career paths, as well as to Engineering, supported by the Arkwright Trust which awards

- bursaries to encourage and support students.
- In discussions with students in every year they spoke warmly of their experiences in D&T. They looked forward to coming to the lessons because the work is different, practical, challenging and they take control of what they are doing. They also felt they were succeeding.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership at whole school level, and within the D&T department is very good.

- The school is committed to providing learning experiences of a very high quality. It recruits and retains staff so that students are given very good opportunities for learning. Money is being well spent to develop modern and appropriate resources for teaching and learning. For example, the resources for computer aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) have been improved through the school's specialist school focus in ICT, and most recently by the purchase of a laser cutter.
- The new head of department has made a significant impact and the team work very well together to develop their teaching materials to form a coherent curriculum that supports high achievement very effectively.
- The environment for learning is satisfactory, with good displays, but there is a shortage of resources for practical electronics and control as well as modern and 'Smart' materials. The range of metalwork processes has been reduced by the gas supply being cut off. This needs to be resolved urgently.

Inclusion

Students' relationships are excellent and they work very well together, whether in their class, in pairs or in groups. They all want to learn and they respect each others' views. Students and staff have excellent relationships and much effort is put into meeting the learning needs of every student.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the provision for electronics and systems and control, and the use of modern and 'Smart' materials in Key Stage 3 to meet National Curriculum requirements
- improving the recording systems for assessment materials so that they can be used more readily.

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