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Ms K Higgins
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Higgins

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 28-29 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 seven lessons.

Design and Technology

The overall effectiveness of D&T was judged to be satisfactory with some good features.

Achievement and standards

Standards are below average at Key Stage 4, but improving, and are average at Key Stage 3. Students make satisfactory progress.

- In GCSE Electronic products last year, 13 candidates were entered for the examination and all but one gained a grade. The A* to C pass rate was above average at 62% and students made good progress.
- For the first time, Catering was introduced as a vocational GCSE. Thirteen students were entered for the examination, and all passed. Students' achievement was satisfactory and 46% gained an A* to C grade. Other

students followed the D&T Food Technology course, and all 16 of them gained a grade. Although only 25% of these students gained an A* to C grade, their achievement was broadly satisfactory.

- On the Resistant Materials course, students did less well and of the 15 entered for the GCSE examination only 2 gained a grade between A* and C. Here achievement was often below that of the students' other subjects.
- The position in Graphic Products GCSE examination results was mixed with all 12 students gaining a grade. However, for some it was below the average for their other subjects. The A* to C pass rate was only 42%.
- The department has stopped the Child Development course and replaced it with a vocational Health and Social Care course worth two GCSEs. This is the second year students have been entered for the examination. These students achieved well, with three students gaining a B grade and four a C grade out of the 13 entered.
- In the AS examination in 2007, six students were entered for the D&T Product Design examination, with one gaining a D grade, three an E grade but two failed to gain a grade. These results are low by national standards but they show satisfactory progress for many.
- In the A level A2 examination in D&T Product Design last year, two students entered and one gained a B grade and one an E grade, showing good progress
- At Key Stage 3, students enter the school with standards that are broadly at national expectation. They now finish the key stage with average attainment and so have made satisfactory progress. There is evidence that standards are starting to rise and in time this should impact on the results at GCSE level.
- Throughout the key stage, students follow a series of modules covering the requirements of the National Curriculum. They gain experience of making products in resistant materials, food, textiles and graphic products although their designing is rather simplistic.
- Experience using both mechanical and electronic systems broadens the designing and making activity. Many students are particularly proud of their electronic systems designs that they make up into useful products to take home. They also study structures, and have a sound understanding of this aspect of D&T.
- Computer aided design and computer aided manufacture (CAD/CAM) are well integrated into the scheme. Students' use of ICT is good.
- Students are able to study and produce a satisfactory range of textile products and a good range of food products in line with the national recommendation.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

Overall the quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Significant attention has been made to improving the standard of teaching and learning in the whole school to raise standards, and this is having an impact in D&T. Indications show that the school's commitment to every child achieving their best is improving students' work, not only through the

teachers efforts but also by the additional support individual students receive.

- No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and the majority of it was good, often with very good features. For example, in an A level lesson, students were being challenged to work out the performance criteria for well know everyday objects. They considered the features of a battery operated electric drill, electric kettles and a flush toilet, making the lesson relevant and memorable.
- The department has four full time teachers, two part-time and one art teacher, who is a specialist in textiles, teaching a textiles project in Year 7. Together they have a very wide range of experience that brings real expertise to the theoretical and practical work in every room.
- Teachers are well organised and committed to the school, the students and their subject. The tasks that pupils undertake are challenging and students say how much they look forward to coming to D&T to do 'practical things'. When talking to students they said that for them all the subjects that had practical activity were the ones they looked forward to.
- Very strong caring relationships are a strength of the provision. Behaviour is well managed so that most lessons proceed at a jolly and constant pace that pupils enjoy. Occasionally a teacher has to take action to ensure that learning can proceed as planned and with the younger students this can take a short while to manage. In the older classes, students seem to have matured and try to keep working throughout the lesson without disruption.
- The electronic projector is well used, and good quality learning resources prepared by the teachers, aid learning.
- ICT is effectively used well in coursework and class work. Homework is set regularly.
- The students' National Curriculum level is reported at the end of Year 9 as required. The strategies for supporting learning, like regular feedback to students and using the published assessment criteria systematically, are not consistently used across the department.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good overall.

- The time given to D&T in the first three years is similar to most schools. It is well used to provide students with a modular course that builds systematically to cover the National Curriculum. The only weakness is that 'Smart' materials are insufficiently included.
- Students cover a series of modules in graphic products, the creation of products in resistant materials, (wood, plastics and metal), food and textiles. These are supported by a good use of CAD and CAM, although facilities in graphics are limited.
- Coverage of structures, mechanical systems, electronic control systems ensure all students are kept up to date.
- At Key Stage 4, students are given a very good choice of GCSE courses in Resistant Materials, Graphic Products, Electronic Products and Food

Studies. Textiles can be followed in Art. The school has wisely developed vocational courses in Catering and also Health and Social Care to match students' future aspirations.

- All 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 some students continue to A2 level. The school is actively encouraging D&T and its vocational partners, to be seen as a subject that links to future career paths.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management at whole school level are very good and leadership within the D&T department is satisfactory.

- The school is committed to raising standards and providing learning experiences that match the needs of the students and in which they can both achieve and attain well. They are able to recruit and retain staff so that the department is fully staffed with specialists and students are given good opportunities for learning. Recently money has been well spent to develop the facilities of the school, most recently over £120,000 was spent from school funds to provide a high quality Catering facility. It is well used both by the younger students and for the specialist course at Key Stage 4.
- Modern and appropriate resources for teaching and learning have been provided, particularly for ICT through the school's specialist school focus. The resources for computer aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) are good but they need to be further improved, particularly in graphics.
- The experienced head of department gives satisfactory leadership to his team. As the teams of teachers are spread into two sections in different parts of the school, they need now to work together more closely together to plan and provide a more coherent experience to students. In each subject area there needs to be more consistency in terms of expectation, commonality of approach together with reliable standards of housekeeping.
- The accommodation is good in catering but the resistant materials area, the graphics area and the other food area are tired and showing their age. The school has long term plans to improve the overall provision.

Inclusion

Students' relationships are consistently good and they work well together in harmony, whether in their class, in pairs or in groups. The Christian ethos of the school shines through and teachers treat children as if they were their own. All want to learn, respecting each others' views and supporting those who have particular needs. In every part of the school much effort is put into meeting the learning needs of every student.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the provision for graphics by providing suitable up to date

- equipment and resources, particularly computer aided manufacture
- sharing the good practice in the department more thoroughly so that in every module and every examination course the best practices are included, such as ongoing assessment, the use of ICT and CAD/CAM.

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