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Miss H Boulton
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Dear Miss Boulton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 7-8 February to look at work in Design and Technology (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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

- Attainment in D&T is broadly average on entry and was broadly average by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2007. Students are now making good progress and are achieving well in Resistant Materials, Textiles Technology and Food Technology. Progress in Graphics is satisfactory and in Electronics it is inadequate. Recent improvements in monitoring students' progress within their GCSE coursework are having a positive impact on standards in the majority of focus areas.
- Standards at Key Stage 3 are above average. GCSE results in 2007 were well above average in Resistant Materials and Textiles Technology. Standards were below average in Electronics, Graphics and Food Technology. There were insufficient numbers of students gaining A* and A grades. However, evidence indicates that recent improvements made in teaching will enable the majority of students to meet their challenging, yet achievable, targets in 2008.

- Students' personal development is good. Students enjoy D&T because of its practical nature and the variety of designing and making activities.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning in D&T is satisfactory.

- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall across the key stages. Good subject knowledge enables enthusiastic teachers to provide well informed guidance to students. A good range of teaching methods is employed to accommodate a range of learning styles in Food Technology, Textiles Technology and Resistant Materials. Teaching assistants are well briefed and have a positive impact on students' learning as does the work of highly valued technicians.
- Students' work is regularly assessed. However, there is some inconsistency in the way in which students are provided with developmental feedback and targets for improvement. There is a developing system for tracking students' progress and teachers are beginning to identify any under achievement and take appropriate action.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Students receive a broad and balanced D&T curriculum at Key Stage 3 and they cover the National Curriculum programmes of study. There is a good range of designing and making activities enabling students to gain experience with a wide range of materials, components and processes.
- The curriculum planning is good and students speak well about the range of projects taught by the department. The one hour lessons are used effectively. However, one hour is rather short for some of the practical food lessons. Teachers give of their time generously and practical areas are accessible to students at lunchtimes and at the end of the school day. Enhancement activities such as "Promoting Healthy Eating" add to students' enjoyment.
- Good designing skills are developed across the focus areas with an emphasis on graphic communication skills in Year 7. High quality design booklets help Key Stage 3 students organise and record their technical knowledge and design work. The use of modern tools and equipment, including computer aided design and manufacture, has a positive impact on the quality of designing and making. However, much of the accommodation is cramped.
- Good D&T outreach work is provided by the department whereby feeder primary school pupils in Year 6 experience D&T taster activities.
- Trainee D&T teachers are regularly supported by the department.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of D&T are satisfactory.

- The D&T departmental team is led by an art specialist. The good coordination of a supportive team is a positive factor in helping to raise achievement and standards.
- The departmental self evaluation is satisfactory and provides an overall picture of the department's strengths and areas for further development. However, the elements of what makes teaching and learning good have insufficient links to assessment for learning and its impact on progress.
- A number of teachers and technicians do not have up to date health and safety training.

Inclusion

Students have equal access to the D&T curriculum with 100% achieving GCSE A*-G grades. Students with special needs are very well catered for and supported by the effective deployment of skilled teaching assistants. These students, therefore, make similar progress to other groups of students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the numbers of students who attain A*/A GCSE grades
- improving achievement in GCSE DT: Electronic Products and DT: Graphic Products
- establishing consistency in assessment for learning across all focus areas
- ensuring that all specialist teachers have up to date health and safety training.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Michael Stanton
Additional Inspector