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Mr P Green  
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Dear Mr Green

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology and Modern Languages

Thank you on behalf of Pam Haezewindt HMI, Michael McIlroy HMI and myself for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during our visit on 14-15 May to look at work in Design and Technology (D&T) and Modern Languages (ML).

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 eleven lessons.

### Design and Technology

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

### Achievement and standards

Achievement is poor and standards are well below average in Years 7-9 and broadly average at Year 11.

- Students enter the school with below average attainment. A trend of low achievement in D&T is established in the school.
- Students reach standards by the end of Key Stage 3 below the average expected for their age. Frequent change of teacher, use of non specialists and unqualified staff has hampered students learning and progress.

- In the 2007 GCSE examination students did less well in D&T than they did in other subjects they studied. The gap between boys' and girls' performance is wide.
- The school's procedures to track students' progress have not enabled staff to identify precisely, or early enough, students who are beginning to fall behind and take action to secure improvement. Teacher assessment of students' design and technology capability is generous.
- Signs of improvement are emerging at Key Stage 4 in response to well founded decisions to have one teacher teaching across all examination groups. In lessons in Year 11 students are generally making satisfactory progress with revision programmes.

### Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching overall is inadequate in its effectiveness.

- Specialist knowledge of food and catering is strong and good relationships are established with students. This is not the case throughout all aspects of D&T. Instability of staffing has had a negative impact on students' learning.
- Systems for storing students' work, regular marking and consistent feedback to students, so that they know how to improve, have broken down. The pace of lessons is slow and this is reflected in both the quantity and quality of work. Much of it, particularly for less able students, and those who have learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD), is unfinished because work is poorly matched to their needs. They make very little progress over a term or year.
- In lessons, students lose interest when a theoretical approach is taken to evaluation and developing ideas because teaching about designing is too narrowly focussed. Students are taught few strategies to enable them to research, create and develop ideas, plan and evaluate their work so that they can develop the skills they need to work independently.
- Students' attitudes to learning and their behaviour in most lessons are satisfactory. Most are keen to participate in practical activities. Students know health and safety rules and apply them. Older students are supported satisfactorily in developing study skills. GCSE Catering students know and understand a broad range of specialist and professional terminology associated with the catering industry. This small group of students take pride in working independently and in applying their specialist skills.

### Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The scheme of work meets basic requirements at Key Stage 3 and regular review over the past two years has shaped projects to better

meet students' interests. Courses, particularly GCSE Catering, meet students needs and styles of learning and this promotes their take-up of further education, employment and training.

- Effective steps have been taken to minimise disruption to students' learning at Key Stage 4. Opportunities to investigate similar approaches to the organisation of Key Stage 3, which involves regular changes of room and teacher, could usefully be employed.
- Accommodation is satisfactory but the school has few resources to support computer aided manufacture. Students have little opportunity to work on real design challenges or client based projects. This considerably restricts students' awareness of the current design and manufacturing industry.

### Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are inadequate.

- Senior management has secured extensive support to improve the quality of students' learning and experience of design and technology over the last two years. Students in Key Stage 4 are now beginning to benefit from a coherent package of support. However, the extensive resources to support and to improve Key Stage 3 have yet to demonstrate this impact and insufficient measures are in place to monitor the quality of teaching and of students learning. Consequently value for money is poor.

The extent to which the D&T department is prepared for the Key Stage 3 and 14-19 curriculum changes:

- Leaders and managers have prioritised maintaining provision in design and technology during considerable staffing difficulties. Awareness of changes and preparation for them has yet to begin.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring regular monitoring and evaluation takes place to check that consistent approaches are in place to store students work, to assess and mark their work and to improve the quality of feedback to students so that they know precisely what to do and how to improve
- checking the quality of teaching and learning to ensure a swifter pace to learning and to improve the progress students make, particularly at Key Stage 3.

### Modern Languages

The effectiveness of modern languages was judged to be satisfactory in Key Stage 3 due to the recent improvements in provision and rising attainment.

However, the overall effectiveness was judged to be unsatisfactory because so few students opt to take a language in Key Stage 4 that the school has judged it not cost effective to provide it in curriculum time since 2005-06. This means that entitlement is not met and that any student wishing to take a language during curriculum time is prevented from doing so and of accessing the benefits a language provides.

### Achievement and standards (Key Stage 3 and post 16)

Standards are well below average; achievement is satisfactory.

- At the end of Key Stage 3 students reach standards which are well below expectations in teacher assessments but there is a rising trend. Girls are doing better than boys, similar to the national trend, but boys have made good gains this year due to more active teaching and learning.
- Post 16 students studying entry level French with business studies make satisfactory progress.
- Progress in lessons observed was mostly satisfactory. Where it was unsatisfactory it was due to weak language teaching methodology.
- Students develop an understanding of the written word from early in their language learning and by the end of Year 9 can deduce the meaning of quite complex texts.
- The majority of students are beginning to have some understanding of grammar.
- There is evidence of satisfactory progression in writing with some good examples of extended writing in Year 9. Whilst it is not always accurate, it communicates well enough.
- Students' speaking is the weakest of all the skills; most do not respond spontaneously. They do not communicate well when reading aloud because they have little knowledge of sound-spelling links.
- Students say they enjoy their language lessons because they are fun and interesting and because they learn about the culture of another country.
- They know well why it is important to learn a language and how it could help them in the future.
- Overall, it contributes well to their personal development and well being in Key Stage 3 and post 16.

### Quality of teaching and learning in Modern Languages

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is adequate; language teaching methodology is variable. This has an impact on students' progress so that it remains satisfactory rather than good.
- Staffing has been a problem over the last two years and the department has only begun to 'get back on its feet' this year.

- Teaching celebrates well students' achievements and is building up their confidence in learning a language. The Year 8 videoing of weather forecasts, played back and peer assessed was a good example.
- The majority of teaching has high expectations and challenges students well; occasionally planning does not take into account all abilities and expectations are too high for some without intensive support.
- A wide variety of activities and resources including information and communications technology (ICT) are used to engage students who appreciate the efforts teachers make.
- Teachers use French insufficiently to ensure that students have consistently good role models so that they can build up their own knowledge to operate outside the confines of a topic area.
- Marking is very regular with helpful and encouraging comments. Students are taught well how to improve their written work. Assessments are regular and help teachers to know what needs improving. The subject leader is aware that speaking needs improving.

### Quality of the Modern Languages curriculum

The quality of curriculum provision is unsatisfactory

- Entitlement to learn a language during curriculum time in Key Stage 4 is not met. Most students to whom inspectors spoke deemed this a lost opportunity.
- The subject leader is offering GCSE French after school from September 2008 in order to improve the situation but this is not a solution.
- In Key Stage 3 the curriculum is satisfactory and improving as the subject leader seeks to make teaching and learning more interesting. Schemes of work are brief but adequate. Some opportunities such as those for ICT, reading and assessment are not included.
- The time provided for language learning in Key Stage 3 is suitable.
- Extra curricular provision is improving including the provision of trips abroad. The school brings in external teachers after school to enable students with home and community languages such as Gujarati or Polish to sit a GCSE.
- Spanish is being introduced into Year 7 where from September 2008 students will have one period each of French and Spanish. One hour a week is a very short amount of time to learn a language and so far there are no plans for how this will be tackled in Years 8 and 9.

### Leadership and management of Modern Languages

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory with some good features.

- Under difficult circumstances the subject leader, after a period of absence, is building up the department and championing languages in the school. She is working tirelessly to improve the climate for language learning.
- She is supported by the relatively newly appointed learning director and monitoring and evaluation is getting underway.
- The department uses data well to track performance and target support.
- There are links with primary schools with some recognition of prior learning in French and work on transition.
- The department self-evaluation and the development plan are well focussed on improvement. However, they lack specific targets.
- The whole school development plan does not tackle the issue of improving take-up in Key Stage 4.
- There is currently only one classroom for languages. Whilst teachers manage this well, there is a lack of space to display students' work and the need to vacate the room on a regular basis is a nuisance requiring teachers to pack everything away on a regular basis.

How close the school is to reaching the benchmarks for language take-up in Key Stage 4

- Currently, no students study a language during curriculum time in Key Stage 4.
- There are no formal plans to reach the first benchmark for take-up as set out by the Secretary for State.

The development of reading skills and how well reading is used to develop language skills

This is satisfactory.

- Students generally understand quite well what they are set to read.
- They are capable of using dictionaries to support their understanding.
- Reading aloud is weak and often does not communicate well.
- Text is used to improve and consolidate students' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.
- A very good variety of reading material is used including authentic resources such as French magazines and Internet sites.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that students' entitlement to learn a language in Key Stage 4 in curriculum time is met
- raising standards by improving teaching and learning from satisfactory to at least good: for example, by ensuring that language learning methodology is secure; and by increasing the amount of target language used on a regular basis by teachers and students

- ensuring that the future curriculum for Key Stage 3 provides students with maximum time to achieve their potential in at least one language as well as engaging them by giving them a taste of another.

We hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T and Modern Languages in the school.

As explained in the previous letter, 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

Gina White HMI  
Subject Adviser, D&T