

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr C Kipling
Deputy Headteacher
Longfield School
Longfield Road
Darlington
County Durham
DL3 0HT

Dear Mr Kipling

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 16-17 June 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T was judged to be satisfactory and the capacity for improvement is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards overall are satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with average attainment and many leave in Year 11 achieving GCSE results in D&T that are broadly average. In 2007 students' achievement in D&T compared well with other subjects they studied in the school and the gap between the performance of boys and girls in D&T is narrower than is found nationally.
- Students enjoy the subject and this is demonstrated exceptionally well in the high proportion of students who continue to study it at Key Stage 4. Students develop good making skills and they are proud of the products they make. However, their knowledge and understanding

of designing for industry and their ability to develop a wide range of ideas and communicate them graphically are weak.

- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) achieve exceptionally well. The intensive and specialist one-to-one support they receive in the Learning Support Unit enables them to cope with the research, planning and evaluation aspects of GCSE coursework.
- Students gain a broad range of experience of designing and making through tightly controlled activities and most reach the standards expected for their age by the end of Key Stage 3. However, teachers' assessments at the higher levels are generous. New procedures to improve the tracking of students' progress, to identify underachievement and to take appropriate action, are at an early stage of implementation.
- Students' personal development is good. The introduction of reward systems such as 'Chef of the week' are used well to promote students' engagement and enthusiasm. Some of the oldest students see relevance in their work and value the contribution it has made to their confidence in acquiring new skills, independence in being able to cook and to look after themselves.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning overall is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and detailed understanding of examination assessment requirements. They draw upon these effectively to plan varied activities and tasks to teach students the practical skills and theory they need for examination courses. However insufficient attention is given to teaching students strategies so that they can use them independently to plan and to research accurately and in detail by the end of Year 9.
- In the best lessons teachers use questioning effectively to check students' understanding. They confidently modify lessons to revisit a learning point to ensure all understand before moving on to more challenging concepts.
- Guidance and support of students is good. Students find revision guidance for D&T examinations helpful along with the particularly clear explanations of some teachers. Staff are highly committed to students and want them to do well. They provide extensive extra time after school to support students who struggle to complete their coursework. Students say this is; "Consistently reliable and always helpful".
- Most students know the level or grade they are working at and what their target grades are. More able students know what is expected of them to reach the grade. Students undertake evaluations of their work, and some identify features they want to improve and set learning targets but the process lacks consistency and their progress towards achieving them is rarely reviewed.

Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum meets requirements. Modifications to the Key Stage 3 course to reduce changeover of groups and to reduce duplication show a firm attempt to bring more consistency to learning. Innovative features such as starting the new school year in June and implementing two hour lessons make good use of time. Opportunities to enable students to begin GCSE courses early in Year 9 and, for some able students, early entry and completion in one year, are just beginning.
- Students are heavily reliant on teachers as previous learning, whilst broad in nature, has provided few opportunities for students to know about designing and making in industry, to design for clients and markets and to apply their learning in challenging contexts. An exception to this is when students run a school coffee shop for a week.
- Older students consider their major project, developed over two years, to be their best work and have no hesitation in recommending the D&T course they followed to other students.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

- Senior leaders provide effective support for the subject; co-ordination and leadership of D&T has been maintained in the face of difficulties and plans to tackle the shortfall in computers and computer aided manufacturing resources and the upgrade of accommodation are advanced.
- The acting subject leader is well informed through local and national networks and uses her up-to-date knowledge effectively to plan the next stage of the department's development. However opportunities for her to develop an overview of all aspects of D&T through regular monitoring of teaching and learning have been limited. Audit and curriculum reviews have identified key weaknesses in the subject and short term plans to tackle the most pressing needs are developing. Subject planning has yet to determine the difference actions will bring to students' learning.
- Health and safety are secured, technician support is good and staff expertise is well deployed.

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

- Planning to develop the D&T curriculum to extend opportunities for flexible study and to gain early Level 2 qualifications is well advanced. However, planning for progression from Level 2 to higher level qualifications in D&T is at an early stage.
- The time currently available for the teaching of food in Key Stage 3 meets the requirement for statutory cooking lessons. The school is well prepared to secure all students' entitlement to cook from September 2008.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the curriculum progressively extends and develops students' knowledge and understanding of industry, designing for clients and markets and provides challenging contexts for students to apply their learning
- enabling students to become independent learners across all aspects of D&T through consistent teaching of strategies so that students can select from them to plan, evaluate and to research accurately and in detail
- improving the rigour of self-evaluation by identifying clearly in subject planning the difference actions will bring to students' learning.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T 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