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Mr T Allen  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Allen

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 2-3 December 2008 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 five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards overall are satisfactory.

- Pupils enter the school with above average attainment. They acquire basic skills and confidence in using hand tools and machinery and they learn and apply health and safety rules well. Pupils' knowledge and skills in using computer aided design and manufacture equipment are weak, particularly in Year 9 due to limited experience in using these tools. Some pupils develop original decorative ideas for products. However, opportunities to make increasingly complex design decisions about how products will function and to progressively acquire the skills necessary to do this are under developed. By the end of Key Stage 3 many pupils do

not make the progress expected given their earlier attainment and they reach standards broadly in line with average.

- Most pupils choose not to continue their studies in D&T but those who do so make better progress and reach above average standards. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment is narrow.
- Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils have good attitudes to learning and behave very well in workshops and food rooms. By the end of Key Stage 4 most work with increasing independence to solve problems.

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

The quality of teaching and learning overall is satisfactory with some good features.

- In all lessons relationships are respectful and pupils' good behaviour promotes their learning. Lessons begin effectively and activities engage pupils and make good use of time. In the best lessons teachers regularly check that pupils understand their work enabling the lesson to continue to move on at an effective pace for learning. Pupils responded positively and quickly learned programming skills because the context in which they used them was relevant and within their everyday experience.
- A lack of specific learning objectives in lessons together with work which is insufficiently matched to pupils' abilities, particularly the more able pupils, characterises the weaker elements of lessons. For example, some pupils' technical skills in food are not sufficiently advanced to enable them to work independently and successfully make the things they choose to.
- Staff provide good support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, enabling them to participate in food lessons and to use tools safely and confidently in workshops.
- Most lessons are well resourced, except for computer aided manufacture.
- Assessment, advice and guidance to pupils are stronger in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3.

### Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Recent changes to the organisation of Key Stage 3 ensure all pupils have opportunities to learn to cook. However opportunities for pupils who want to continue their studies in Years 10 and 11 are not yet secure.
- Changes to Key Stage 3 are providing depth to pupils' learning about materials.
- Planning of the curriculum has not brought the separate material areas together coherently enough to develop pupils' design and technological capability or to support pupils in progressively acquiring the key concepts of the subject and the essential skills they need to manage projects independently.

- Key Stage 4 courses, including those recently introduced, are embedded and successful.
- Opportunities for pupils to work with designers, engineers and chefs are limited. The school has built a network of local and global links, particularly with Cameroon, but has yet to use them in D&T to enable pupils to undertake real design and make assignments or to experience the challenge of working with clients.

### Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

- You and your senior leadership team have successfully provided a mixture of challenge and support to raise standards and achievement.
- The subject is well managed and consistent approaches are taken to draw together information to inform self-evaluation and subject development planning. A promising approach is being taken to more accurately identify the profile of pupils' attainment in D&T on entry to the school. However a vision for D&T is not fully developed or shared with staff, pupils or parents.
- Teachers find the local technology support group useful in helping them to stay in touch with subject development. However a lack of access to high quality subject training courses acts as a constraint to their further professional development.

### The extent to which inequality and stereotyping are tackled in D&T

- The school is challenging stereotypical subject choice and more girls have taken up GCSE electronics in the last 12 months.
- Subject development planning recognises a need to encourage more boys to take up textiles but not enough investigation into what stops boys doing so or analysis of the curriculum has taken place.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing and promoting widely a shared vision for D&T
- planning Key Stage 3 together as a team to more effectively promote progression in pupils' learning
- ensuring all students have opportunities to work with designers and makers and to apply their D&T understanding, knowledge and skills to solve problem in complex contexts.

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  
Her Majesty's Inspector  
Subject Adviser for Design and Technology