

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mrs P Mullins  
Headteacher  
St Francis of Assisi Catholic Technology College  
Erdington Road  
Aldridge  
Walsall  
West Midlands  
WS9 0RN

Dear Mrs Mullins

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 20-21 October 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 pupils, scrutiny of departmental documentation, analysis of students' work and the observation of ten lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards overall are outstanding.

- Students enter the school with attainment broadly in line with national average. Students' prior experience in D&T is varied. Nevertheless progress is outstanding as students achieve much better results than nationally. Overall attainment in D&T GCSE has improved rapidly from 59% A\*-C grades in 2006 to 76% (unvalidated data) in 2008. Over this period girls' average attainment has been better than boys' but the difference between them has narrowed. Boys' average attainment is higher than national.

- Students with learning difficulties and /or disabilities (LDD) achieve well. Those with dyslexia benefit from the intensive and specialist support they receive in the unit for specific Learning Difficulties. The high expectations of staff ensure all students aspire to do well and succeed.
- Students' personal development is good. They behave with maturity and respect and this supports very effective group and team work. Students value D&T and believe it will equip them well for future life. They understand the challenges provided by the design briefs and make judicious use of the support offered by staff. Students work with a high degree of independence.
- Specialist college status has had a positive impact on D&T provision. Rooms have been refurbished and computer aided designing and computer aided manufacturing (CAD/CAM) facilities have been developed. As a result, all students experience current manufacturing technologies and develop a very wide range of expertise to make high quality products. Students' skills in designing and making are outstanding and they are justly very proud of their work. However, a lack of computers in the food room limits opportunities for students to model food products through the use of nutritional analysis software in Key Stage 3.

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

The quality of teaching and learning overall is outstanding.

- Teachers have high levels of subject expertise and form an effective team. They are inspirational in their teaching and students clearly enjoy the work. Planning includes a wide range of appropriate teaching strategies and ensures that activities are matched to students' needs. Learning is driven by effective assessment. Students are given precise targets for improvement which enable them to take the next steps to advance their work. Students are clear about marking schemes and use them to assess each others' work accurately.
- Frequent and well planned practical work gives insights which show students how underpinning theory works in practice. This enables students to explain design concepts clearly and to apply them with confidence.
- All staff are flexible in their approach to design briefs and this encourages a wide range of individual design solutions from all students. Students said that teachers were 'always helpful' and 'explained work clearly'. This helped them try new and novel things.

#### Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum meets requirements. Modifications are appropriately being implemented to meet the new Key Stage 3 National Curriculum requirements for Year 7. Teachers are keen to ensure that their current good practice in building students' skills and knowledge is further developed. Students are allowed to opt for two D&T subjects in Year 9 and this reduces to one subject at Key Stage 4. Students say that this increasing specialisation keeps them motivated.
- Students' previous learning is effectively built upon in all lessons and clear links are made to other areas of D&T. This consistency in approach has increased students' confidence in their learning. Systematic use of the 'students' voice' in evaluating modules of work enables the staff to respond quickly if projects are not working out as planned.

### Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are outstanding.

- The senior leadership team provides effective support for D&T. Specialist technology status has been used to improve boys' achievement and engagement in their learning.
- The head of department is an inspirational leader and teacher. He consistently models good practice. His commitment to ensuring technology for all underpins the department's ethos. Departmental data is analysed effectively and monitoring of teaching and learning in the department is secure. Monitoring information provides a firm platform on which the department effectively plans and continues to improve.
- Health and safety assessments are secure. Technician support is good. Staff deployment enables all to play to their strengths.

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

- The school recognises the need to address the lower average attainment of boys compared with girls. The school's tracking system quickly alerts staff to variations in individual student's performance and appropriate strategies have been devised to support potentially disengaged and lower attaining students. Deadlines for Year 10 and 11 work are clearly advertised and all students are effectively supported in meeting them. Systems are in place to ensure that students do not fail if they experience a bad patch in their studies.
- The school is aware that girls tend to choose textiles and more boys tend to choose systems and control. Staff continually review projects to attract boys and girls equally, but with mixed success.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing students' modelling skills in food through the use of nutritional analysis software.

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

Michelle Parker  
Her Majesty's Inspector