

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



15 December 2006

Mr Wakefield
Headteacher
Alder Community High School
Mottram Old Road
Gee Cross
Hyde
SK14 5NJ

Dear Mr Wakefield

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13-14 December to look at work in 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good overall.

- By the end of Year 11 students standards are broadly in line with the national average. Latest results in 2006 show this trend has been maintained and students' achievement is good given their starting points on entry to the school. Good advice and support to GCSE students and frequent assessment and feedback underpins their good progress.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) make good progress and achieve well in D&T.
- Students in Key Stage 3 make satisfactory progress in lessons and standards are broadly in line with the national average.
- Students' personal development is good. Their attitudes and behaviour in D&T are good and they know and follow health and safety rules very well.

As a result they are developing confidence and proficiency in using machines and equipment, and in using computers to aid manufacture.

- Students enjoy and are engaged by the designing and making activities and the proportion of students choosing to study D&T courses at the end of Key Stage 3 is increasing. Enterprise opportunities and production line simulations are well structured to enable them to work as members of a team and they make an effective contribution to promoting their economic well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, class management and organisation. The best lessons are briskly paced and are characterised by a range of challenging and time limited tasks and activities. Identifying criteria to inform the development of a design brief is consistently taught well and students make effective use of this to inform their initial design ideas.
- Lessons are well resourced. ICT is used effectively by teachers, for example in demonstrating the use of mood boards by textile designers and in explaining specific drawing tools and techniques when using computer aided design (CAD). Students are confident users of CAD and apply well the ICT skills taught in other subjects. Younger students are adept at using ICT to research and they can find visual and factual information quickly. However, they do not use this fully to inform design decisions or to solve problems as they arise in the design and manufacture of their products.
- The purpose of each lesson is generally made clear to students and they know what they have to do. However, teachers' planning, particularly in Years 7-9 does not define precisely enough the specific knowledge and the concepts students are expected to understand. Consequently this does not help teachers to evaluate sufficiently what students have learnt by the end of the lesson or to inform the planning of subsequent lessons to progressively move learning on.
- All students know their targets and the level they are working at. Younger students are sometimes unsure of exactly what they need to do to improve the quality of their work to move to the next level.
- Peer assessment is a consistent feature in D&T lessons and is a useful step towards developing students' evaluation skills. However, the detail of what students need to look for is not explained precisely enough and the opportunity for them to learn from this activity is lessened; students say "we sometimes guess and just say what we think".

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the D&T curriculum is good.

- Work is well-planned to ensure designing and making skills and work with electronics, systems and control are appropriately developed. Current rotation arrangements in Key Stage 3 do not help students' progress. The curriculum is under review and plans to extend the opportunities for students to use computer aided manufacture and to make best use of new resources for laser cutting are in place.
- Students are not challenged enough to develop creative, unusual and innovative solutions to design problems in their own work.
- Visits and extra curricular activities enrich the curriculum. Older students are beginning to respond to the encouragement to seek out real contexts for their design work and some final projects are based upon their work for local organisations and businesses. Students have little contact with designers and engineers and opportunities to involve them and develop awareness of the application of D&T in life could usefully enhance the curriculum further.

Leadership and management

The Leadership and management of D&T are good.

- D&T is valued and supported well by governors and senior leaders.
- The subject leader knows his team well and has a clear vision and informed view of subject development. Self-evaluation accurately identifies strengths and issues for development. Planning is effective and is well demonstrated in improved standards and the consistency with which most procedures are quickly implemented and. Resources and accommodation are good.

Inclusion

- Students with LDD are well supported in lessons with step-by-step demonstrations and through the additional help they receive from learning assistants. Differentiated resources and tasks help them to succeed but opportunities to use them are missed in some lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve planning and evaluation to sharply identify what students have learned and where gaps remain. Use the information to inform the planning of subsequent lessons to progressively move learning on
- ensure students in both Key Stages are encouraged to develop innovative and creative products and are taught strategies to enable them to do so
- ensure all marking of students' work promotes improvement.

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

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