

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr A Nicholson
Headteacher
Hodgson School
Moorland Road
Poulton-le-Fylde
Lancashire
FY6 7EU

Dear Mr Nicholson

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme:
Design & Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3-4 March 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

Design and Technology

Provision for D&T is good overall with some outstanding features. Its capacity for further improvement is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Students' D&T attainment on entry to the school is varied but broadly average. It is well above average in the GCSE examination when they leave. This indicates that they make excellent progress and achieve similarly well. The lessons seen show that they make this degree of progress evenly throughout the school.

- Students of all levels of ability do very well. Those with learning difficulties are given highly effective support, either by teaching assistants or by their teachers supervising their project work. Able students are very well challenged by the course work projects and the proportion of those reaching the grades A and A* is very high.
- Attainment is well above average across the full spectrum of the courses taught. The new manufacturing course is now showing strong signs of success. More established courses have performed consistently well over the years. Last year's dip in results in GCSE textiles is not reflected in the work of students currently in Year 11 whose coursework is assessed at this point in time at a very high level.
- The performance of boys in D&T throughout the school is exceptional. Their results in GCSE last year were excellent and significantly above the national figure for those reaching grades A* - C.
- Students design, make and evaluate products in range of materials to a good and often excellent standard. Designing is creative and has improved recently as the staff have developed effective methods of encouraging students to think as designers.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Assessment is excellent.

- Teaching was good overall in the lessons seen. Teachers interested students in the work using a lively range of teaching methods and activities. Students responded very positively to this though on occasions a minority required firm handling to ensure concentration.
- The staff in the department together display a broad range of expertise in most of the areas of D&T though expertise in systems and electronics is less evident in Key Stage 4 where such courses are not taught. This apart, staff expertise underpins the very rigorous coverage of subject content which is a strong feature of teaching quality here.
- Staff have responded well to past training in teaching methods for courses in Key Stage 3. They have developed an interesting range of methods to stimulate students' creative designing. The potential to develop this further is very good.
- All classes are of mixed ability. Students of all abilities are given good and appropriate levels of support as they work through their projects. This is enriched by the exceptionally good provision of individualised coaching during extra curricular 'catch up' sessions run by the staff in their own time. Students report to be very appreciative of this. This firmly supports the high standards which students attain.
- Courses are very well planned, sequenced and administered. They run smoothly.
- Group sizes are very large with up to 26 students with one teacher in some Key Stage 4 workshop classes. Students note that this puts considerable pressure on staff and reduces the time they have for individualised attention relating to their practical projects. The school needs also to consider the health and safety issues of teaching such large

groups when using hot equipment, sharp tools and fast-moving machinery.

- Assessment and tracking of progress are excellent. The schools has developed thorough procedures for tracking in recent years and the department adheres well to these.
- Marking, the giving of feedback, staff and peer assessment are all done very well as a matter of course. Students have a very clear insight in to how well they are doing and the levels of performance at which they are aiming.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum for D&T is good.

- A good range of interesting designing and making projects is covered in Years 7-9 giving students a solid foundation for subsequent option choices. They have equally good coverage of designing, making and evaluating products.
- A good range of GCSE courses is run in Years 10-11, including a vocational course in manufacturing, though the important and 'hi-tec' areas of systems, control and electronics are not taught in depth to this age range.
- ICT is well used by staff to teach the curriculum and by pupils to research, design and make.
- The schemes of work are clear and effective guides for teachers as they run their courses.
- A very good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities supplements the main curriculum.

Quality of Leadership and management

Leadership and management of D&T are outstanding.

- The school provides excellent support for D&T in the curriculum. Students regard the subject highly and virtually all study it up to the end of Year 11. Vocational education also has high status within the school and there are clear plans to develop this further.
- The department has received very effective whole-school help to develop its very comprehensive systems for assessing students work and tracking their progress.
- The department is outstandingly well led and managed. Clear procedures exist to promote efficient teaching and learning. Administration is good. There is a strong and cooperative team spirit.
- Accommodation, though satisfactory overall, is located in different parts of the school. Facilities for graphics and resistant materials are limited and they are very limited for systems and electronics. There are good plans to bring in further equipment for computer aided designing and making. The accommodation and resources are very well managed.
- Self evaluation within the department is excellent. The departmental evaluation report is concise, frank, evaluative and evidence based. It is

well supported by very thorough reports on technology college progress and on student attainment. The focus is rightly on teaching, learning and standards.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing a long term plan to further improve the teaching of designing using the National Strategy Key Stage 3 training materials for D&T
- considering how to strengthen the teaching of systems, control and electronics
- reviewing group sizes to ensure that they promote individualised teaching and safe working practices
- as funding permits, developing the accommodation and co-location of rooms to promote better coherence in provision for D&T.

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

Peter Toft HMI
Ofsted Subject Adviser, D&T