

Aviation House  
125 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)



8 October 2009

Mr P Ramsey  
Headteacher  
Verulam School  
Brampton Road  
St Albans  
Hertfordshire  
AL1 4PR

Dear Mr Ramsey

Ofsted survey inspection programme – design and technology

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 and 25 September 2009 to look at work in design and technology (D&T).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on how the school promotes awareness and relevance of D&T to students and their parents, and the extent to which their views contribute to the school's evaluation of 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is good.

Achievement in D&T

Students' achievement is good and standards in D&T are above average.

- Most students' attainment on entry to the school is above average. By the end of Key Stage 3, their attainment and progress are satisfactory. Most develop a secure understanding of the characteristics of materials and techniques and a broad range of practical skills but their designing and

project management skills are less well developed and this constrains them in reaching high levels of attainment.

- By the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment at GCSE level is consistently above average, with many achieving the highest grades, A and A\*. Sixth form students also achieve very well.
- Most students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are gifted and talented make good progress and achieve well, but some students struggle to meet and manage the demands of coursework in food technology. Action to tackle this issue is already underway.
- Students make good or better progress in most lessons and particularly in their personal development. They enjoy solving problems and taking decisions to develop and plan their work. Most students act responsibly, and use complex equipment safely. Their understanding of diet and nutrition are good. Students say they are confident in making healthy meals.

#### Quality of teaching of D&T

Teaching and learning are good.

- The majority of lessons are good with some outstanding features, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and use a wide range of strategies and resources expertly to engage and motivate students and promote their good progress in Years 10 to 13. For example, the innovative work of designers was used effectively to challenge sixth form students to think creatively to solve problems and communicate their ideas quickly. Technicians, other adults and sixth formers are deployed effectively in lessons to support students in catching up and those who are ready to move on. As a result, students in Years 10 and 11 learn at a rapid rate.
- Assessment systems are securely in place. Most students know what is expected of them and they work at a good pace. In the best lessons teachers regularly sought feedback from students to check their understanding and to tackle misconceptions. In a minority of lessons, mostly at Key Stage 3, teaching did not build sufficiently on what students knew about a new topic at the outset, or check sufficiently on their learning during the lesson.

#### Quality of the curriculum in D&T

The quality of the D&T curriculum is satisfactory

- A wide range of new courses and qualifications at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are very well matched to students' interests, needs and aspirations. Current Year 10 and 11 students find the structured approach to coursework helps them to be more productive and they are making good progress in improving their project management skills.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is satisfactory. Actions to bring coherence to the teaching and assessment of designing skills and the introduction of personal learning resources to support students are promising developments. The emphasis on cooking skills and the making of healthy meals in the scheme of work are very popular with students: they enjoy cooking for pleasure but some are unhappy at the amount of time for lessons which constrains their learning. Some students are unaware of the school's well formed plans to change this situation.
- Planning is satisfactory but occasionally the link between what students will do and what they are expected to learn is unclear in teachers' plans. This is particularly so in some modules at Key Stage 3. Some of the activities in Years 7 to 9 are in need of updating, as they make too few demands on developing students' thinking skills and their awareness of social, cultural and moral considerations when designing and making.
- Extensive ICT resources are used satisfactorily to improve the accuracy, quality and speed of manufacture, but the school is not exploiting them sufficiently to support students in creating unusual and innovative features in the products they design.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

Leadership and management in D&T are good.

- Your support and that of governors and senior managers is well demonstrated in the impact specialist accommodation and staffing resources have had on the quality of teaching and students' achievement in D&T.
- The subject is well-led and management systems, including health and safety, are firmly established. Monitoring and evaluation strategies are in place and lead to plans that are having an impact.

The school satisfactorily promotes awareness and relevance of D&T to students and parents

- The school has a secure vision for D&T. It is shared with staff and is beginning to be shared with parents. Students see the relevance of what they are learning to careers, particularly in engineering, and to their personal development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring consistency in teaching and planning so that teaching builds upon students' earlier learning and the link between teaching objectives and learning outcomes is explicit
- modernising activities in the Key Stage 3 curriculum to promote greater challenge and opportunities for students to acquire designing and project management skills
- using ICT to better effect to enable all students to exploit the creative and innovative features in the products they design.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T in the school. As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gina White  
Her Majesty's Inspector