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Mr M Rodaway
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Rodaway

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: design and technology (D&T)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 10 and 11 February 2011 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is good.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is good.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 was below national expectations overall for D&T with 57% A* to C grades at GCSE. However, students achieved above average grades in food technology and just below their challenging targets in product design. Students make good progress in lessons.
- In Key Stage 3, students learn basic skills and develop good design and making capabilities. This equips them well for the next key stage. They work well in pairs and groups. They demonstrate good reasoning skills. They plan carefully and evaluate their work and can explain how they modified and developed their ideas. Students explain clearly how other designers have influenced their work. For example in Year 8, students design and make tealights influenced by their study of the Memphis style.

Quality of teaching of D&T

The quality of teaching of D&T is good.

- In the majority of lessons, learning moves at a brisk pace with slick routines that ensure no time is wasted. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, all students arrived promptly on time and ready to cook. Students were clear about the methods to use to prepare their roast vegetables and so tackled their work confidently.
- Teachers used their good understanding of D&T to engage students' interest well. Questioning effectively checked students' understanding and challenged and deepened their thinking. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on mechanisms, students worked in groups and had to explain to each other how different mechanisms worked.
- Teachers used the virtual learning site to support teaching and learning and to help students to complete homework.
- Teachers use the National Curriculum Levels to check the progress of students and to set targets for them. However, students are not always sufficiently supported in identifying the next steps in learning towards their targets. This limits their capability to make decisions and to take independent approaches to their work.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

The quality of the curriculum in D&T is good.

- The curriculum provided is broad and balanced. The introduction of three days a year, when students work on cross-curricular topics and apply their D&T skills, supports their learning. A wide range of enrichment activities, such as the engineering master class, links well to D&T. They develop students' understanding of science, technology and mathematics and encourage students to opt to study engineering at Key Stage 4. Homework links well to work studied in mathematics and helps students to develop the ideas that are introduced in class.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

Leadership and management in D&T are good.

- The subject leader has a clear vision and dedication to developing the subject. He is focused on improving teaching and learning and raising the profile of D&T. Work with external partners provides high-quality D&T experiences.
- Self-evaluation is good. Monitoring appropriately focuses on developing teaching and learning. Planning for health and safety is secure.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that teachers explain what students need to do to for their next steps in learning so that they can work more independently in all key stages.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector