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Mr H Lay
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lay

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 15 and 16 March 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is outstanding.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is outstanding.

- Most students' starting points are below average for their age. Achievement from these starting points is outstanding and attainment trends are consistently above average. All students gain GCSE A to C grades and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good and sometimes exceptional progress in line with other students. The best performing course is food technology where students make exceptional progress at all key stages. Evidence in lessons confirms this. The quality of work is high and the designing and making process is well demonstrated.
- Students' technical making skills are strong and those who undertake advanced level courses are developing their design thinking and achieving good outcomes with some exceptional progress in product design.

Students are enthusiastic about the subject and their involvement in D&T projects. An outstanding feature is their achievement of awards such as 'Active Kids Get Cooking gold awards', and certificates in basic food hygiene. Some older students said that they found them relevant and particularly useful in helping to gain jobs to support themselves during their studies.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- Teachers' expert knowledge of materials and techniques is used effectively to enable students to make well-crafted prototypes of their designs. Lessons are well managed and encourage learning at a good pace. Students enjoy their learning and say that teachers' use of examples of other students' work helps to inspire their ideas. Students' behaviour is good and they are keen to make and to acquire technical skills. However, younger students in Years 9 and 10 would benefit from learning specific strategies to enable them to generate and develop design ideas quickly, particularly when using graphic, textile and resistant materials.
- Work is assessed accurately and the information is used to drive individual learning. This is secure in Years 11 to 13 but less so in Years 9 and 10 where students follow a course which is less differentiated to their particular needs. In addition, lesson objectives in a few of these lessons were not as specific or measurable as others and, consequently, students were less clear about how to improve their work and their next steps. An exception to this is the work undertaken for 'Active Kids get cooking'.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- The school has outstanding examples of individual students designing and making products that have an impact on the community. The subject leader knows that the way forward is to engage more students in meeting customers' design requirements; and to update the curriculum. Year 9 students are developing independence in using computer-aided design and in programming laser manufacture. The high quality and breadth of sixth-form students' individual research and testing are appropriately extending their awareness of current health and nutrition issues.
- Schemes of work place a solid emphasis on technical skills although in parts the teaching of designing skills and use of electronics is not emphasised enough. Insufficient opportunities are provided for students to learn about modern and smart materials.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

Leadership and management in D&T are outstanding.

- The school's commitment to excellence and attention to detail are well demonstrated in the work of the department. The subject leader has a

good understanding of the strengths of the department and what is needed to improve further. He acts on advice and puts improvements in place quickly. Students' views are used effectively to inform and develop provision: for example, in the Year 9 food course. Professional development is used effectively to inform practice and is demonstrated in teachers' information, advice and guidance to students concerning examination criteria and coursework feedback.

- Support from senior leaders is well demonstrated in the investment in resources, school tracking systems and the regular systems used in the department for monitoring and evaluating students' progress. Health and safety are very well implemented in classrooms and workshops by teachers and students. Staff training is up to date and this was demonstrated especially well in their accurate teaching about power tools.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that lesson objectives, especially at Key Stage 3, are clear and measurable, and that students are fully aware of what they need to do to reach higher levels
- making greater use of electronics, modern and smart materials in Key Stage 3 and 4 courses.

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

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector