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Mr K Grainger
Principal
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Dear Mr Grainger

Ofsted 2011–12 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 21 and 22 June 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 was below the national average in 2010. The school is tackling the issues well and interventions, such as coursework booster sessions are helping to promote students' confidence and better understanding of how to achieve their targets. The school's careful tracking system indicates that Year 11 students, and the relatively small number of post-16 students studying product design and textiles, are on course to achieve better results in 2011. Year 10 students' current progress in lessons is mostly good and improving, especially in food technology and catering courses.
- At Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress. They enjoy using their own ideas and the skills needed to work in small groups and teams

are developing well. However, their skills in planning and evaluating their work are weaker and they have fewer opportunities to make decisions and work with independence during Years 7 and 8.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Good relationships, high expectations and students' enjoyment and initial high levels of engagement characterised the lessons. Teachers are competent in using a variety of teaching methods and make effective use of resources, including those they produce themselves. The best lessons are well structured to meet students' needs, develop deeper learning and consolidate knowledge and skills. Questioning was developmental, challenged students' thinking and promoted faster progress. In such lessons, students had high ambition and demonstrated good levels of independence and skill. For example, in food lessons, students worked quickly and safely to complete their cooking, they organised and managed their working area and met deadlines.
- Not all lessons were like this and the constraints of the task, limited questioning and a lack of clarity in success criteria did not challenge students sufficiently and limited their abilities to demonstrate independence and draw upon earlier learning. For example, where questioning was narrowly focused, teachers were unable to adjust their lessons sufficiently in the light of student feedback, to challenge their thinking even further, and promote swifter progress.
- Assessment practice at Key Stage 4 is strong. Assessment criteria are exemplified well by teachers and students know precisely what is required to move on and to reach the next grade and their targets. In contrast, assessment and feedback are inconsistent at Key Stage 3 and do not focus sufficiently on the specific strands of designing such as planning, research, testing and evaluation.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- Year 9 students are prepared well for the next stage of learning through participation in the restaurant project. Together with the good opportunities provided in Key Stage 4 and sixth form courses, this enables students to personalise their learning to a high level and this promotes their enjoyment, independence and understanding of the subject. Students' awareness of their responsibility to design in sustainable ways and their knowledge and skills in using computers to aid their drawing and manufacturing are developing more securely at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. Students' awareness of modern and smart materials, well-designed products, and opportunities to work with designers, engineers and chefs are relatively underdeveloped. The school recognises this and plans to further enrich the curriculum in this way are planned.

- Curriculum planning at Key Stage 3, particularly in textiles, does not focus sharply enough on students' progressively improving and developing designing and making capability. Schemes of work do not coherently link the objectives, activities and success criteria in every module of work to promote good learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

The effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T is satisfactory.

- Resources and facilities are excellent and are at the cutting edge of development. Together with effective use of external scrutiny, they represent the good support and challenge provided by senior leaders.
- The subject leader ensures that staff training is used to good effect to underpin good assessment practice at Key stage 4 and health and safety are effective and firmly embedded in lessons. Monitoring and evaluation are beginning to focus more firmly on the quality of the Key Stage 3 curriculum and of students' learning. However, this is not sufficiently rigorous to transform the curriculum and secure students' good progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that lessons are adjusted in the light of student feedback and assessments to better meet students' needs, challenge their thinking and promote swifter progress
- ensuring curriculum planning at Key Stage 3 clearly identifies what students will learn and every module of work coherently links the objectives, activities and success criteria
- improving the rigour and depth of monitoring of students' learning and the quality of curriculum planning to inform the next steps for development.

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