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Dear Dr Gillespie

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 23 and 24 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 three lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is good.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is good.

- Students in Year 7 build steadily on their previous experiences to broaden their basic skills and understanding of the working properties of materials. Year 8 students make faster progress and the quality of finish and accuracy in making products is enhanced by the use of computer-aided design and manufacturing. By the end of Year 9, some students are developing independence in managing their work; they demonstrate decision-making skills and show flair in their design ideas. However, their understanding of the processes and the properties of the materials they work with, while strong, is limited in range. Their skills in analysing the key points of their research and devising appropriate tests are less strongly developed as a result. Teachers' assessments show students

make good progress but the school recognises a need to better document students' achievement through the use, for example, of project booklets.

- The number of students who continue their studies in D&T at Key Stage 4 is low, but the outcomes for those who do are good. Trends of well above average attainment are firmly established in GCSE courses in graphic design and food technology: for example, in 2010 almost all students gained A* to C grades and around two thirds gained A* or A grades. Students make good progress at Key Stage 4, as do the small number of sixth-form students. Their progress is underpinned by their strong commitment to complete their work by attending extra sessions after school. Sixth-form students are highly motivated. They are developing maturity in their understanding of good design and apply these principles in their work.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- Teachers' specialist knowledge and commitment to the subject are good and they have high expectations of their students. Peer review and opportunities to work in groups are well integrated in all lessons.
- Year 10 lessons are structured well to promote deeper understanding of examination requirements in an engaging and thought provoking way. Students are inspired by the products they investigate in lessons and say that this is challenging their thinking and their expectations about the things they will make. This approach is less firmly established in Years 7 to 9 than it is among the older age groups.
- Assessment is very sharply focused on the next steps for improvement and Year 10 students left their lessons with a good understanding of precisely what to do to be successful in gaining the highest grades. While students know their targets and current level of work this precision is less securely developed in Key Stage 3.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- Good enrichment of the curriculum through D&T clubs, trips and competitions supports students' achievement well. Students enjoy the opportunities to take decisions, develop independence and personalise their learning to design and make for themselves and others. A greater focus on sustainability and students' use of computer-aided design is developing. However, the curriculum is not keeping up with technological developments: the innovative use of modern and smart materials and opportunities to explore their properties is underdeveloped. Schemes of work at Key Stage 3 do not build progression securely; students regard the projects as separate and say they are less challenged by some.

- The curriculum links satisfactorily to other areas of the curriculum. For example, opportunities for students to apply their scientific knowledge and understanding in their work on diet and nutrition are established.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- The subject leader is enthusiastic and effective: day-to-day management is good and well-structured policies for marking and assessment are monitored well. Subject leadership is identifying where change is needed but she has yet to establish a vision for the next steps in transforming D&T and in securing innovation in students' work. Good attention is given to health and safety in policy and in lessons and students make effective use of 'health and safety passports'. Staff give huge amounts of time and energy to developing students' D&T capabilities beyond lessons. Professional development is used well to develop teachers' knowledge and guidance to support students in examination groups.
- Senior leaders in the school provide effective support for D&T in the form of resources, analysis of data and advice and guidance to support the new subject leader.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a vision for D&T to promote greater innovation in students' work
- modernising the curriculum to provide greater opportunities for students to learn about modern and smart materials
- ensuring students' progress is consistently developed in Key Stage 3 schemes of work.

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