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13 October 2011

Mr K Whittlestone
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Whittlestone

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 3 and 4 October 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 observations of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 has been significantly below the national average for D&T with 32.9% of students gaining A* to C grades at GCSE. Food technology which is separately led and has had stable staffing for the last three years has been improving. Historically, girls have achieved better than boys, and those students from Bangladeshi backgrounds and students known to be eligible for free school meals perform less well than others. In lessons, all students make at least satisfactory progress. Effective monitoring and tracking of all students coupled with individual mentoring for each student ensure that prompt interventions are made to maintain students' progress. Vulnerable students, those who are eligible for free school meals and those for whom English is a second language are well supported and make the same

progress as other groups. Students are encouraged to discuss their ideas in lessons. Students identify and practise key technical words during the discussion of activities, although opportunities are sometimes missed to develop these further in homework.

- Key Stage 3 students learn basic skills well. By the end of the key stage, most have begun to develop their design capabilities but there are insufficient opportunities to extend them further. This is because teaching does not sufficiently link and extend designing across all material areas.
- Sixth-form students are highly motivated and set themselves challenging targets and tasks. They understand and explore the work of designers well and then apply their new insights and skills to their own work.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- All teachers have good relationships with students and work very hard on their behalf to support and help them, including regular after-school activities. Students value this interest and support greatly. Students reported that teachers always help them, offer solutions, and work with them in a fun way. They enjoy the lessons and are justly proud of their work.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan interesting lessons and encourage group and paired work. However, at times, teachers talk for too long and activities continue for too long. Thus, opportunities to move students' learning on at a better pace are missed. Teachers' planning is sound and differentiation caters for most students but is not always sufficiently aspirational enough for what they could all achieve.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- At present the curriculum is not sufficiently broad and balanced in both key stages. This is because students do not have opportunities to study electronics or systems and control.
- Students' designing capabilities are not fully developed in Key Stage 3. Although students develop understanding of specific materials, their broader progress in designing and making across each of the material areas has not been considered sufficiently to ensure that work is progressively challenging.
- A good range of extra-curricular activities links well with science and extends and develops students' economic well-being.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- The recently appointed head of D&T works closely and very effectively with the head of food technology. They have brought staff together into a cohesive team with a common vision and shared goals. Target-setting, monitoring and tracking systems have been tightened and ensure that staff are supported and held to account. Professional development of staff is matched to the department's development plan and shared effectively with all department staff. Behaviour within the department has greatly improved and is good, because staff are now supported and expectations are clear and shared. This has been welcomed by staff and students.
- Health and safety policies meet all statutory requirements. Appropriate risk assessments are carried out and students are able to take responsibility for safe working practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students' design capabilities are developed and extended through the material areas to promote better progression and provide more challenge and complexity to improve their chances of gaining A* and A grades at GCSE
- increasing the courses offered at Key Stage 4 to broaden choices and understanding of electronics and systems and control. I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T in your school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector