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7 October 2011

Mr V Ashdown
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ashdown

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 27 and 28 September 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is good.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is good.

- Most students enter Year 7 with attainment close to Level 4. They make satisfactory progress to reach national expectations for their age by the end of the key stage. The majority of students do not continue their studies in the department beyond Key Stage 3.
- For the third of students who choose to continue to study vocational courses in engineering, hospitality and catering, or in construction at Key Stage 4, and to advanced study in the sixth form, outcomes are very good. A trend of high attainment is well established in engineering by the end of Year 11 and Year 13, and in hospitality and catering in Year 11. Students, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress to secure these outcomes.

- Students say that their experiences in D&T, particularly in food technology, are a strong influence on their decision to study these vocational courses.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- In most lessons, students made satisfactory progress in response to the teaching, although there are examples of good teaching in the department and stronger progress over time in students' work. Teachers' specialist technical knowledge is thorough and displayed well in clear and competent demonstrations, especially in hospitality and catering lessons. In the best lessons, teachers interwove appropriate reference to industry and health and safety. Students' working files for their vocational courses show evidence of an increasing complexity in their studies, and a steadily expanding awareness of the engineering, construction and catering sectors. This is securely displayed in Key Stage 4 and in the work of sixth formers.
- Students are keen to achieve their best, and their attitudes to learning are good. They mostly demonstrate good recall of the function of equipment, ingredients and processes in response to teachers' questioning. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to challenge students further, for example, to probe greater depth and reasoning when questioning, and to engage students in managing their time to promote their independence.
- Students undertaking vocational courses, and particularly hospitality and catering, are provided with detailed and frequent assessment of their work. However, students said that they were less clear about this aspect of their Key Stage 3 work. D&T assessment criteria lacked clarity in some lesson plans and in the Key Stage 3 schemes of work.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- The vocational courses provided at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form meet students' expectations. These courses are securely planned and informed by detailed criteria for each unit of work that are also shared with students. Teachers' effective use of resources and training underpin the successful implementation and development of vocational courses.
- The Key Stage 3 scheme of work is broad and provides a strong platform for students' further work in food preparation and nutrition at Key Stage 4. However, it provides too little depth for students to develop a secure understanding of the key technological concepts of sustainability, and of mechanical and electronic systems and control. This undermines students' progress towards higher levels of attainment. Opportunities to enliven the curriculum by providing more exciting and practical activities in these areas may support the school in making headway to tackle the issue of students making stereotypical gender choices of vocational area at Key Stage 4.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- The school has acted decisively to ensure that the department is appropriately staffed and supported in its work through the provision of health and safety training, facilities for vocational courses and up-to-date resources for computer-aided design and manufacture. The acting subject leader has tackled effectively the impact of the staffing change in engineering and construction courses. As a result, students' progress is on track and they feel confident of achieving their targets.
- Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses in the department and the key issues for further development. Monitoring systems are in place to support self-evaluation but regular and formal use of students' views is not informing D&T practice enough in developing Key Stage 3.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the Key Stage 3 curriculum to promote better progress and depth to students' understanding of sustainability, electronics and systems and control
- ensuring that assessment criteria are clear in every Key Stage 3 unit of work and shared with students from the outset
- enhancing practice by formalising the use of students' views to inform the regular monitoring and development of D&T.

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

Yours sincerely

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector