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Mr J Fox
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Fox

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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is inadequate.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is inadequate.

- Most students start Year 7 with skills and capabilities in D&T which are similar to those normally found. By the end of Year 9, their attainment is lower than seen nationally and fewer students continue in the subject. External examination results at the end of Year 11 are around the national averages. However, these results do not reflect the potential students demonstrate when they join the school in Year 7. This pattern is also reflected in post-16 courses. Progress in all key stages is inadequate and, as a result, students do not achieve as well as they should. The school is now aware of this and new challenging targets for individual students are being set.

- Students are keen and ready to learn in lessons, working safely with a good range of equipment. They work well in teams and are helpful to each other when working on their projects. Their attitude to learning is good.
- Students' ability to demonstrate their creative flair and originality is too often hindered by the activities and projects that they are given. Their thinking and decision-making as designers are not developed. Their knowledge of modern materials and technological advances are weak.
- Students do not have a good enough understanding of the level they are working at or what they need to do to improve.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Teaching is satisfactory overall, although there are examples of good teaching throughout the department. Staff have very good working relationships with the students.
- Assessment takes too little account of students' prior learning, particularly in Key Stage 3 and it is not used effectively to measure attainment and increase students' progress.
- Although teachers use a variety of teaching styles, the practical demonstrations conducted often dominate lessons providing too little time for students to develop their own work, or show what they know and can do. This slows progress.
- Although students are kept busy in lessons and staff work hard, planning fails to ensure that work builds on prior knowledge and is sufficiently challenging for all students. This is because objectives for lessons, from the schemes of work, focus too much on the completion of tasks and adult input rather than consolidating or extending the learning for individual students.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- Schemes of work in Key Stages 3 and 4 are poorly planned to progressively build students' knowledge and their understanding of important concepts. Too many of the activities fail to ensure that sufficient attention is given to the development of designing skills and, consequently, their progress in this essential aspect of the subject is poor. They do not enable students to create innovative functional solutions or provide sufficient challenge, particularly for the most able.
- Where better projects exist they are set in real world contexts, such as the design and production of T-shirts for the school's international work with the Gambia. Newly offered courses, for example the BTEC courses in engineering and hospitality and catering, also provide opportunities for direct links with industry and commerce. The school is in the early stages of exploiting these opportunities; the new leaders have some innovative ideas and plans to be implemented in the near future.

- Extra-curricular provision is a major strength of the department and includes the 'Rocket club, 'Formula one for schools', and the Key Stage 3 'Make It! Club. These types of stimulating projects and the enterprise activities undertaken throughout the school would benefit the day-to-day curriculum at Key Stage 3 for all students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- The monitoring of students' progress is inadequate. Actions have recently been taken to improve the systems and to hold the department to account. The department's current action plan is not of sufficient quality to ensure that the weaknesses in the curriculum and poor rate of students' progress will be resolved swiftly and effectively. The subject's performance has not been accurately evaluated in the past and, consequently, the areas for improvement and development have not been understood.
- Drive, determination and commitment exist at all levels of leadership to bring about change. The very recent management structure is challenging the department to improve. The sharing of teaching, resources and knowledge with the science department have only been in place for four weeks and it is too soon to judge the impact. The actions required to ensure that the school's new and exciting vision for the department is realised and that achievement improves need to be implemented rapidly.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing more opportunities for students to learn how to solve challenging and interesting 'real-life' problems and extend their knowledge and experience of using technologically advanced materials and manufacturing processes
- improving teachers' planning so that accurate assessment is used to direct the next steps in learning and that assessment data are effectively shared with students to enhance their independence.

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

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector