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9 November 2011

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Principal
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Dear Dr McMurdo

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 1 and 2 November 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 good.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has been steadily improving and is broadly in line with the national average for D&T. However, performance in the different material areas in D&T varies considerably: 75% of students studying dual award engineering gain A* to C grades at GCSE compared with only 37% of students studying GCSE food technology. Historically girls have performed better than boys both in the number of A* and A grades and A* to C grades but this is beginning to change.
- In the lessons seen, most students made at least good progress. The school uses its tracking and monitoring systems very effectively to identify the minority of students who are at risk of not meeting their challenging targets. A range of carefully tailored interventions is made to maintain students' progress. Students are encouraged and supported well in

working independently in lessons. Key technical words are identified by staff and students are encouraged to use these, although opportunities are sometimes missed to maximise their use in students' speaking and writing.

- Key Stage 3 students enjoy learning basic skills and are actively encouraged to be creative in their thinking and problem solving. This prepares them well for work in Key Stage 4. However, teachers do not always ensure that students' thinking, literacy and technical skills are sufficiently challenged to encourage students to reflect and improve their ideas.
- Sixth-form students are highly motivated and set themselves challenging targets and tasks. They produce high-quality and innovative work which indicates their sound understanding of the work of designers and industry.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge well to plan work which interests students. The majority of lessons are good or better. In lessons which are no better than satisfactory, teachers talk for too long at the beginning of the session which slows learning, and their questioning does not always encourage students to explain their thinking fully.
- Creativity in students' thinking is being developed well. Students are proud of their work and relish the opportunity to make individual pieces which meet the design brief. For these reasons, the overwhelmingly majority of students said that this was their favourite subject. At times, teachers do not systematically ensure that students' technical understanding is developed alongside their making capabilities. This limits their opportunities to gain higher grades. Opportunities to develop design ideas which reflect students' diversity of culture are sometimes missed.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. There is a good mix of courses that students of all abilities can opt for, and this encourages them to study and enjoy learning in D&T. The wide range of extra-curricular options available links effectively with mathematics and science. Stronger connections with core subjects are beginning to be embedded into all lessons and schemes of work.
- The department is working to ensure that progression across the key stages and material areas is improved to tackle weaker areas of student progress.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- The leadership team is fairly new and it has already completed an impressive amount of work. The strong team spirit, shared vision and enthusiasm for the subject are infectious. The love of the subject and desire to do the best for every student are at the heart of all they do. Tracking and monitoring of students' progress are secure and used to support staff and to hold them to account.
- Health and safety procedures meet all statutory requirements. They are understood well by students and this allows them to work safely with high levels of independence.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving opportunities in teachers' planning to ensure that more complex thinking skills are developed so that students' literacy and technical understandings are challenged and extended in every lesson thus promoting opportunities for students to achieve at a higher level
- enhancing students' understanding of multi-cultural Britain through encouraging them to develop design ideas that reflect their diversity of culture rather than a predominantly White British view.

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

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector