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Mrs V Dennis
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dennis

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 11 and 12 January 2012 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is inadequate.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is inadequate.

- Standards in D&T are below average at both key stages as a consequence of significant turbulence to staffing over two years. This has disrupted the quality of learning with the result that many students have gaps in their knowledge and understanding of designing. Students' knowledge of the properties of materials is narrow and their skills in research, annotation, developing designs and in planning are poorly developed, particularly at Key Stage 3.
- There is considerable variation in the achievement of the low proportion of students who study the subject in Key Stage 4. Boys, particularly those from White British backgrounds and those who are admitted to the school mid-term, make slow progress with the result that many underachieve in

GCSE. Students who undertake courses in textiles, hospitality and catering and construction make satisfactory progress to achieve their targets compared with those who take resistant materials, graphic products and food technology.

- Students' progress is beginning to be more consistent across the examination classes as a result of teaching that is tackling gaps in their learning. However, the impact is not yet seen in examination results.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Teachers focus successfully on developing students' technical skills in sewing, drawing and cooking. Teachers demonstrate or use their own work to model the expectations they have of students. Consequently, most students understand what they are expected to do but not always what they are expected to learn. Due attention is given to developing students' understanding of 'keywords' such as pre-heat, temperature and aesthetics. In the best lessons, tasks and activities are well planned to sequentially build students' understanding, knowledge and skills. In these lessons, teachers check students' work and adapt their plans to ensure that students understand before moving on. However, this is not a consistent feature across teaching and, in general, lessons lacked sufficient challenge for all students, or missed opportunities to develop independence and decision-making skills.
- Key Stage 4 students are developing a firmer understanding of the criteria for assessment, and good practice is emerging in the detailed feedback that some students receive. This is not securely established in Key Stage 3.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum does not meet statutory requirements and schemes of work are poorly planned to develop, progressively, students' knowledge and skills in designing and making. Opportunities at both key stages for students to solve complex problems, to manage projects and to create innovative, functional products to meet the needs of a wide range of users are limited.
- Courses in construction and hospitality and catering provide opportunities for direct links with industry and local businesses. The school is at the early stages of exploring these opportunities; the new subject leader and the senior management team have some innovative ideas but they have yet to incorporate them into firm plans for implementation.
- Extra-curricular provision is at an early stage of development. A food club is popular with students. Links with science, technology and engineering (STEM) are planned but not yet in place.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- Drive, determination and commitment exist at all levels of leadership and management. Staffing turbulence has subsided and new staff are in post. Accommodation has been refurbished and the school has tackled the issue of outdated computer-aided design and manufacture equipment. All students are able to take part in cooking activities as a result of well-founded decisions to fund the cost of ingredients. Systems to monitor teaching and learning are in place and students' progress is beginning to improve.
- The new head of D&T knows what good practice looks like. He has taken a firm lead to introduce new courses and has taken students' views into account in making improvements. The department has yet to develop a shared vision to guide the development of the subject.
- Appropriate attention is given to health and safety. Risk assessments are in place and students follow safety and hygiene instructions in lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the achievement of all students and particularly boys, by:
 - ensuring that tasks and activities are consistently matched to the needs of all students and learning is monitored by teachers during lessons to secure better progress and attainment
 - improving the planning of the curriculum so that it progressively develops students' D&T capability, challenges and excites them to solve complex problems, to meet people's needs and to create innovative products
 - ensuring that a shared vision and distinct purpose guide the development and direction of D&T and the best practice in assessment and feedback is shared consistently across the department so that all students understand what they are expected to learn.

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

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector