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Mr M Woods
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Dear Mr Woods

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 with my colleague, Amraz Ali HMI, on 24 and 25 January 2012 to look at work in D&T. Please pass on our thanks to the headteachers of the primary schools who met with us to explain the work that is taking place between them and your school.

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 16 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is good.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is good.

- Students' attainment on entry to the school is slightly below the expectations for their age. They make satisfactory progress to acquire practical skills in using tools and equipment safely, including computer-aided design and manufacture, and they learn how to shape materials by exploiting their properties. Students are proud of the products they make. However, they make slower progress in developing their designing skills. This is because the work is not planned sufficiently to accelerate the development of these essential skills. This hinders students' independence in developing their capability in designing in both key stages.

- Students enjoy D&T and almost everyone continues to study the subject at Key Stage 4. From their starting points, the majority of students make good progress in their courses and especially in graphics and textiles. The small numbers of more able students who sit the GCSE D&T short courses in Year 9 reach standards that are well above average: almost all attained grades A to C at GCSE in 2011.
- The school has made significant progress in 2011 to close the gap between boys' and girls' attainment which previously had been very wide.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Teachers have very good technical knowledge. They generally manage lessons well and establish clear routines. Good relationships provide a supportive learning environment that helps students to learn that making mistakes can be an important step to improve and refine their ideas. Teachers' questioning and students' recall and understanding of subject terminology are well developed in all lessons. The best lessons are well planned to progressively develop students' knowledge and understanding of new concepts or to tackle gaps in students' learning. In these lessons, teachers adapt their plans or adjust levels of support in the light of students' responses. However, the pace of learning slows in some lessons, particularly in Key Stage 3, as a result of lengthy introductions to tasks, an over-reliance on worksheets and the occasional use of low-level tasks rather than a deeper focus on evaluation.
- Marking and feedback to students are frequent, constructive and make effective use of criteria particularly at Key Stage 4. An overemphasis on presentation and appearance characterise some of the marking at Key Stage 3 and this does not help students to know how to improve to reach the next level.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- Good partnership links with primary schools and extensive transition work provides early opportunities for students to experience computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) and the memory of this is strong when they enter the school. Such work continues to develop well with CAD featuring extensively in almost all students' work at Key Stage 4.
- Teachers' knowledge of examination criteria and specifications is good and they apply this effectively to design interesting courses. The introduction of the short course at Key Stage 3 provides an effective foundation to further study and helps the more able students to deepen and broaden their knowledge and understanding. Extra-curricular opportunities provide extensive opportunities for students to undertake D&T outside lessons. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is outdated: opportunities for students to learn about control technology and modern and smart materials are given too little attention. Students enjoy the opportunities to further develop their

skills to meet users' needs and bring about improvements, for example, by undertaking real-life challenges such as re-designing an area of the school. This good practice is limited and not all students have the opportunity to meet the needs of users in a range of different contexts.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- Formal processes and systems in the school support subject leaders in monitoring students' progress and in maintaining a good overview of strengths and priorities for improvement. Good planning ensures that accommodation, resources and safe working practices support learning effectively. However, monitoring and evaluation procedures lack rigour and depth, particularly in identifying and sharing the good practice to tackle the inconsistencies emerging in some lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring rigorous monitoring and evaluation and regular sharing of good practice to eliminate inconsistencies in teaching and learning
- modernising the Key Stage 3 curriculum to ensure that more prominence is given to control technology, modern and smart materials and designing and making to meet the needs of users in a range of contexts
- extending the opportunities for students to undertake real designing and making projects in their community to bring greater relevance to every student's work.

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