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Mr M Jackson
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Dear Mr Jackson

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: design and technology (D&T)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 26 and 27 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 nine lessons. A Year 8 learning walk was conducted and students' learning in a further four lessons was observed.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment and progress vary across key stages and between courses. For the vast majority of students whose experience of D&T ends at Key Stage 3 their progress and attainment are satisfactory. Students' experience of D&T before entering the school is varied. Staff are beginning to develop a more secure approach to identifying their starting points but currently this is not yet enabling them to address their needs precisely.
- Students develop high-quality craft skills in a narrow range of materials to support their making of products. They enjoy and take pride in their work. Students' knowledge of computer-aided designing and making (CAD/CAM) and technological developments is limited, especially at Key Stage 3 due to poor resources for computer-aided manufacture. Their progress in

developing designing skills, particularly in planning and evaluating their work is relatively weak. This is because the curriculum is not planned sufficiently to accelerate the development of these essential skills. This hinders students' independence in developing their capability in designing during Key Stages 3 and 4.

- The small numbers of students who continue to study D&T and take examination courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form receive considerable support from teachers. Their attainment is above average but few go on to achieve the very highest A* and A grades. Most students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress, particularly in resistant materials and catering.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Students' progress accelerates in lessons that are well planned to progressively develop their knowledge and understanding of new concepts or to tackle gaps in their learning. In these lessons, teachers adapt their plans or adjust levels of support in the light of students' responses. Support staff are well briefed on their role and demonstrate this in well-focused questioning with groups of students. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities respond very well and make good progress. However, the pace of learning slows in many lessons as a result of lengthy introductions to tasks and too much focus on what students should do rather than what they will learn.
- Students work is used consistently across the teaching team to share expectations of quality with classes. However, some lessons consist of low-level tasks, such as colouring in, and duplicate the students' earlier learning using computers. The use of 'helping hands' in some lessons encouraged students to set targets to complete their making. However, many lessons were not pitched sufficiently to challenge students to think for themselves.
- Opportunities for students to collaborate and share ideas are well planned, particularly in food and catering. However, peer-assessment is used indiscriminately in almost all lessons and does not always add to what students already know. Students enjoy using the homework booklets, a feature of learning used consistently throughout the department. They like the opportunities provided to work on tasks, some more challenging than others, over a period of time. Some students set deadlines for their work and almost all students readily complete them.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- Extra-curricular activities, competitions and catering for school events are much enjoyed by students and add realism and relevance to their learning. The proportion of students who choose to study D&T is increasing

steadily. Some students are developing detailed knowledge of the hospitality and catering industry.

- The curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 3, provides insufficient opportunities for students to develop their knowledge and understanding of modern and smart materials, sustainability and electronic systems and control. Students tend to work in a narrow range of contexts that provide few opportunities for them to meet the needs of a range of different users.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- The subject leader and staff team share a passion and enthusiasm for the subject and do their best for every student. Evaluation informs the key priorities for the department's development. However, monitoring of the quality of teaching is not sufficiently focused on identifying the impact it has on accelerating students' progress and tackling the inconsistencies by sharing good practice across the team.
- Health and safety risk assessments are in place and students are developing very good attitudes to applying health and safety in practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- monitoring the quality of learning to ensure that students make better progress and to make sure that good practice in teaching and learning is promoted consistently throughout the department
- modernising the Key Stage 3 curriculum to improve students' knowledge and understanding of modern and smart materials, sustainability, electronic systems and control and provide opportunities for them to meet the needs of a range of different users
- ensuring that the subject has appropriate CAD/CAM equipment to support students' progress in complex designing and making and their understanding of current industrial practice.

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