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Mrs C Brooker
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Brooker

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 9 and 10 February 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.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is good.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is good.

- From their above-average starting points, students make satisfactory progress by the end of Key Stage 3. Girls achieve slightly higher than boys and the school is aware of the need to close gaps, both between boys and girls, and also between the small numbers of students from groups such as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are eligible for free school meals.
- Trends in students' attainment are consistently high by the end of Key Stage 4. Almost all students made good or better progress to meet their challenging targets in 2011. Small numbers of students continue with D&T in the sixth form and an improving trend in attainment and progress is established.

- Most students make good progress in lessons. They have responsible attitudes to health and safety and develop good technical skills. Students' analysis and research skills are satisfactory. However, some students' independence in time-management skills, particularly in food technology, is insufficiently advanced.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- Teachers' good specialist knowledge is well demonstrated in their development and use of resources and in the very good technical and health and safety instruction students receive. Students are engaged in lessons and enjoy them. They are quick to recall key words and technical language, for example during lessons on casting. Good relationships between teachers and students are demonstrated in students' excellent social skills and collaborative working. Students learn from each other, particularly in sixth form lessons where they share ideas and are evolving good professional approaches to their work. Some students are developing innovative ideas for products.
- Support staff make an effective contribution to students learning. As a result, students who are less able and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress to complete their work in lessons. However, methods used to record the progress over time of some students are narrow and do not always capture the depth and breadth of their knowledge and understanding. Marking is mostly informative and specific. Most students are clear about the next steps to take to improve, but occasionally teachers' comments are overly concerned with presentation.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- There is a wide range and good blend of specialist D&T and vocational courses at Key Stage 4. They are personalised to students' needs. Students say they feel very well supported and advised in their courses. The school challenges the gendered choices that students make about courses. However, research into the differences in how boys and girls learn in D&T has yet to be investigated.
- A well-founded decision to introduce product design in the sixth form is beginning to contribute to bring the subject together. However, the Key Stage 3 curriculum is not sufficiently coordinated as one subject. Consequently, students have little experience of sustainability or opportunities to use smart materials in current schemes of work and in lessons. Some projects restrict students' ability to make design decisions and over emphasise decoration rather than focusing on construction.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- Both subject leaders share a passion for their subject and vision to prepare students for life and work in a technological world. They work separately, but both leaders have responded to students' views to make changes to courses. Collaboration between the two halves of the subject is beginning but much remains to be done to ensure that the curriculum is planned coherently and assessed consistently, particularly at Key Stage 3.
- Health and safety processes are secure and risk assessments are very well aligned to the scheme of work. Teachers undertake a range of professional development activities. The impact of this is reflected in good advice to students about their coursework and in ensuring that they are exceptionally well prepared for examinations.
- Challenge from senior leaders has contributed to the development of teachers' practice and ensures school procedures for intervention and tracking students' progress are in place.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that D&T is taught as one subject, especially at Key Stage 3, to make certain that assessments accurately and consistently reflect the breadth of students' work
- closing the gaps in students' attainment by using a wider range of strategies to record what all students know and understand about D&T
- improving students' time management, especially in food technology.

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