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Ms E Aylesbury
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Aylesbury

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 21 and 22 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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is good.

- In 2011, students' attainment was broadly in line with national averages. An improving trend in students' performance in GCSE resistant materials and in engineering and hospitality and catering courses is emerging. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by templates and writing frames to help them successfully organise their ideas and coursework and to tackle gaps in their prior learning. As a result, the majority of students currently undertaking examination courses are making good progress from low attainment on entry to the school. The extensive support that students receive outside lessons makes a strong contribution to Year 11 and sixth form students' progress and attainment.

- Students' progress in lessons, particularly at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Their knowledge and application of computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) are developing well and support them in realising their design ideas. However, their knowledge of the properties of materials is limited. Students are motivated and proud of the products they make. They follow instructions and apply health, safety and hygiene procedures appropriately.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour and most students respond well to clear routines and act safely in lessons. The best lessons took place in Key Stage 4. They were planned well: learning objectives were very clear and focused use of tasks ensured that they consistently deepened students' knowledge and understanding. For example, students made very good use of criteria to critically analyse other students' work and the challenge increased as they applied what they had learnt to improve the quality of the product they were making. In such lessons, teachers' specialist subject knowledge was demonstrated in effective questioning and in advice and guidance tailored to individual students and directed to enable them to take the next steps to secure improvement.
- In most lessons, planning focused on what students would do but did not explain the purpose of the activity in terms of what they were expected to learn. For example, opportunities to clarify and improve students' knowledge of what good annotation looked like were missed. Peer-assessment tasks often added little to what students already knew because learning had not been made explicit. Good use is made of support staff, including technicians, to provide individual support to help students complete written and making tasks. However, tasks were not tailored enough to ensure that all students, particularly the most able, were sufficiently challenged by them. Students did not always work as independently as they could and were dependent on teachers to manage their time, particularly in food and hospitality and catering courses.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- Students were very positive about their examination courses which met the expectations that they had of them. The individual support they receive from teachers and technicians is valued and respected. The school's programme of science, technology, engineering and mathematics activities is starting to show a positive impact on students' take-up of sixth form courses in D&T and excellent examples of individual students who have gone on to engineering degree courses from A-level Product Design. The trend is more securely established in science and mathematics.
- Current Key Stage 3 schemes of work provide detailed activities for each lesson but the focus on knowledge and skills is inconsistent. Insufficient

attention is given to sustainability, electronics and the properties of smart materials. Repetition in the schemes and insufficient variety in the contexts and target markets that students design for undermine students' achievement of higher levels and grades.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- The subject leader has worked well with senior leaders and has demonstrated the capacity to bring about improvement in a short period of time. Health and safety procedures are secure and risk assessments are in place. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning are securely in place and effective use is made of students' views. Actions taken have improved resources, particularly for CAD/CAM and have brought greater consistency to marking and feedback, particularly at Key Stage 4. Systems are in place to track and monitor students' progress. Decisions to provide greater information about students' D&T baseline on entry to the school are well-founded.
- A vision for D&T is evolving, particularly around developing and modernising practice further but this has yet to be shared with all staff who contribute to the teaching of D&T.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening curriculum planning particularly at Key Stage 3 to ensure that it is securely focused on deepening students' knowledge and understanding as well as their practical skills
- ensuring that teachers provide more challenging tasks to accelerate learning, particularly for more able students
- providing more opportunities for students to progressively develop independence in their learning.

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