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Mrs E Hayes
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Hayes

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 14 March 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory and strongly improving.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Students are making satisfactory progress, many from lower starting points than normally found. Disruptions to the teaching in the previous two years caused GCSE results to fall from above the national average in 2010 to below average in 2011. Evidence confirms the school evaluation that more students are on track to gain higher GCSE grades at the end of Key Stage 4. The school acknowledges that progress at Key Stage 3 is inconsistent and boys are not achieving as well as girls and action is being taken to make improvements.
- Students enjoy taking responsibility for their own design ideas and thinking. They also enjoy the challenges presented by D&T work, particularly taking risks when designing. They are learning new skills well to make their own products. Information and communication technology is

effectively used to research and present design information, and computer-aided manufacturing is at the centre of many projects.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- Recent staff changes and increased stability have resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching. Students respect the teachers' good subject knowledge and they learn to design and make products that work well. There is a clear emphasis on designing and making products accurately and to a professional standard, and lessons are managed effectively to develop design thinking and to encourage new ideas.
- Practical activities make good use of the available time and the best teaching quickly engages students in design-and-make tasks which sustain motivation and concentration for long periods. The teaching encourages students to develop their own innovative design thinking, for example when designing and making high-quality jewellery and table lamps in Years 9 and 10.
- Assessment practice and the analysis of data to indicate how well students are doing have improved and are more effective. The information is used to plan the next steps in learning and to check individual progress more frequently. Lessons are well planned, managed and taught. Teaching meets the needs of a wide ability range of students who are encouraged to learn at an appropriate pace in lessons.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- Students are familiar with D&T terminology and enjoy learning new practical skills. They use an appropriate range of materials at Key Stage 3 and activities effectively meet their needs. Learning is not always continuous across the years in all aspects of the subject and the school is aware that ensuring progression to develop students' D&T capability is a priority. Action is being taken, for example by moderating teachers' judgements of students' performance to ensure that assessment levels are used more consistently. Resources are well used to ensure that products are made with thought, accuracy, and precision. The curriculum is most effective when it helps students to design and make for themselves through sustained practical work over time.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- Recently, senior leaders have acted quickly to move the subject forward by appointing a new subject leader and challenging subject performance more rigorously. The vision for D&T is shared with staff to ensure that the subject continues to flourish. The capacity to improve has significantly increased with new staff appointments which are already making an

impact on raising achievement and attainment. There is a strong team ethos which students and staff value. The school's own evaluation of the strengths and areas to develop is detailed, rigorous and accurate.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- rapidly improving the continuity and consistency of learning across the year groups and particularly at Key Stage 3
- raising achievement by eliminating the gap to ensure that all students, and especially boys make the progress they should.

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

Paul Hancock
Her Majesty's Inspector