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Mr M Guest
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Guest

Ofsted 2012–13 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 23 and 24 April 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment at Key Stage 4 is broadly in line with national averages. Students are developing good attitudes to learning, particularly when opportunities to personalise their learning and to explore the uniqueness of D&T comes to the fore. This is particularly well demonstrated in GCSE textiles and in the BTEC hospitality and catering courses where students are developing confidence in making. Most students make satisfactory progress during lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4, and some are making good progress towards their examination targets.
- Students' knowledge and understanding of the properties of materials and their use of computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) are underdeveloped at both key stages due to limited access to CAM resources. Occasionally this results in some students not completing their

work with resistant materials in the time available. Aspects of designing such as annotation, planning, evaluation and testing are weaker aspects of students' work. Consequently teachers' assessments of students' work at the higher levels in Key Stage 3 are overly generous.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Teachers have high expectations and are knowledgeable and confident about their specialist courses at Key Stage 4. Well-established routines ensure that lessons are managed safely and students follow teachers' instructions and guidance. Students are keen to make products and to learn about sustainability. Some tasks provide good opportunities for students to demonstrate innovative thinking. For example, one student identified a new game as an alternative use for a plastic milk bottle. However, students do not always have a clear enough understanding of how products are made, or enough experience in using materials and processes, to be able to fully exploit their ideas.
- Although lessons met most students' needs, they were not always tailored sufficiently to challenge all students and to take learning on so that they made good progress. Students know what is expected of them in tasks and how they will be assessed. However, the quality of marking and feedback and the approaches to checking that work was completed were inconsistent across the teaching team.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- 'A stronger focus on solving problems and an opportunity to learn from your mistakes' are cited by students as important contributors to their progress. In this respect, Key Stage 4 courses provide them with opportunities to challenge their thinking, take decisions, and provide time to tackle the gaps in their learning to improve their knowledge and skills in designing and making. A well-considered programme of visits and opportunities after-school is helping to develop students' awareness of the subject.
- The school recognises that the current Key Stage 3 scheme of work does not meet the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. Work is under way to ensure that electronics is reinstated. However, opportunities for students to learn about mechanical systems and control, to work with modern and smart materials, and to learn how everyday products are made using CAM are too thinly represented.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- The subject leader has ensured that teachers' knowledge and planning for Key Stage 4 courses are up to date and that health and safety

requirements and training are met. The impact of this is evident in new courses that meet students' needs and in students' adoption of safe working practices. Together with the adoption of school-wide monitoring procedures, this is resulting in improvements in their progress at Key Stage 4.

- Strengths and weaknesses are known and inform improvement plans. Further work to ensure that teachers are updated about progression at Key Stage 3 is recognised. However, monitoring and evaluation are not always rigorous enough to ensure consistency in the quality of assessment, marking and feedback to promote students' good progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring the missing parts of the Key Stage 3 schemes of work are in place to improve the rigour and challenge of learning
- enhancing resources for CAM to improve the management of students' time, the quality of their designing and making, and their rates of progress during lessons
- ensuring consistency in accurate assessment, marking and feedback to students to ensure that learning is appropriately pitched to challenge them.

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