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Dr J Ferguson  
Principal  
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Dear Dr Ferguson

### **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 2 and 3 May 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 and a learning walk.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

#### **Achievement in D&T**

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Students join the school with D&T skills and knowledge that are in line with those seen nationally for their age, and for some students their attainment is above average. A trend of above average results was established, however, in 2011 in Key Stage 4, and in sixth form examinations, attainment fell. Small numbers of students across most courses, and particularly in graphic design, underachieved.
- Most students are now making satisfactory progress, although variations remain with some good and inadequate progress seen in lessons and in students' work. Students can make decisions, plan, evaluate and follow their own lines of enquiry. However, opportunities to refine their thinking and to develop the skills necessary to manage projects are absent in Key Stage 3 and limited in parts of some Key Stage 4 courses. Consequently

more able students do not always make the progress they are capable of to achieve the higher levels.

- The subject contributes effectively to students' personal skills. They can use tools and equipment safely and are developing good technical skills. Sixth form students are confident and well informed about the next steps in their learning and work with a high level of independence.

### **Quality of teaching in D&T**

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Teachers manage lessons safely. Some make great efforts to extend their specialist technical knowledge and do so competently. Students are engaged and clearly enjoy lessons that are practical, challenging and relevant. This was demonstrated well in a Year 7 lesson when a competition to test the robots they had made provided a good spur to students' enthusiasm to find ways of improving them.
- In the best lessons, Year 11 students work with a high level of responsibility and personalisation. For example, they set their own learning targets and organise their individual tasks to meet specific deadlines. However, this is the exception, and in most lessons insufficient attention is given to lesson planning to ensure that learning objectives are securely focused on developing students' knowledge and understanding.
- Assessment systems are known and understood by students. However, assessments and data are not always used to tailor learning. Consequently, many lessons do not challenge all students so that they made good progress in their learning.

### **Quality of the curriculum in D&T**

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

- The school recognises that the current Key Stage 3 scheme of work requires further improvement and consideration in parts. Much of the designing and making are fragmented and students do not always understand the relevance of what they are learning to solving real technological problems or to meeting people's needs. This is in stark contrast to the excellent way in which teachers have planned sixth form courses. The rigour of designing for others, and the challenge of making costumes to fit, and to meet deadlines, is regarded by sixth form students as contributing significantly to their learning.
- Opportunities to meet and work with designers, engineers and chefs are currently limited in the schemes of work; however, some Key Stage 4 students valued the opportunities to undertake work experience in design-related businesses. Participation in the Greenpower programme, and the introduction of *Ready, Steady, Cook* in food lessons, are proving popular and enrich students learning.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T**

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

- The department is well led by a knowledgeable subject leader. Extensive procedures are in place to support much of the department's work, for example, to support assessment and to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. The findings inform development planning, however, analysis is not always rigorous in identifying the reasons for problems and this hinders the effectiveness in tackling them.
- The department has yet to develop a shared vision with staff, students, parents and carers to guide the subject's development.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- improving the quality of teaching and learning so that objectives clearly identify what students will learn and lessons are adjusted in the light of student feedback and assessments to promote greater challenge and swifter progress
- improving the planning of the curriculum so that it is relevant and challenges and excites students to solve real problems to meet people's needs
- ensuring that a shared vision and distinct purpose guides the development and direction of D&T.

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**