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Mr N Beischer
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Dear Mr Beischer

Ofsted survey inspection programme-
Design and technology/Art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my joint visit with Peter Toft HMI on 21 and 22 September 2006 to look at work in design and technology, and art, craft and design.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons. We also appreciated the thorough, well-informed and accurate self-evaluation you shared at the start of the visit and the additional opportunities you provided to talk to staff with responsibility for specific initiatives.

Design and technology

The overall effectiveness of design and technology, in the focus areas of resistant materials, graphics and systems which are currently taught within the product design courses, was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

- Given the very low attainment of students when they enter the school in Year 7, progress is good and most students achieve well. This is particular so in the making parts of the course although capability in designing is less well developed.
- Compared with national figures, results in the GCSE examinations are low.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.

- Teaching is well planned and carefully sequenced with ample practical activity which leads to high levels of interest among students.
- Teachers have good class control, subject expertise and a willingness to meet the specific learning needs of students.
- Procedures for assessment and target setting are thorough.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Adequate time is available for the subject and this time is used efficiently.
- Recent improvements in the organisation of the curriculum in Key Stage 3 are well designed to promote better continuity and progression in students' learning.
- The new product design course is developing well and staff, collectively, have the breadth of subject expertise to teach it effectively.

Leadership and management

The subject is well led and managed.

- A strong co-operative spirit exists amongst staff and they work effectively as a team.
- The good behaviour of pupils is well secured.
- The school has a clear idea of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject.
- Resourcing is modest and the accommodation is very dated. However, the new building will help the school overcome these problems.

Inclusion

The subject's contribution to the inclusion of students is good. All students, including those with learning difficulties, are given effective and firm guidance. This underlies the obvious enthusiasm shown by most of them for the subject, especially its practical activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to capitalise on the new building to convey to students a modern and 'hi-tech' image of the subject
- in preparation for the new facilities, to undertake a systematic search for modern projects which will motivate pupils
- to develop further the teaching methods to help pupils to learn to design creatively
- to work with the school's senior managers to strengthen pupils' capacity to listen and concentrate in lessons.

Art, craft and design

The overall effectiveness of art, craft and design was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

- Students make very good progress from the start; they enter the school in Year 7 with mixed experiences and generally low attainment. A high proportion of students go on to achieve high standards in the GCSE examinations compared with national figures and their other subjects.
- Students are committed to the subject; they listen carefully, respect the expertise of the teacher, show sensitivity to and interest in the work of others and great pride in their achievements. Across a range of traditional and 'new' media the most successful work is supported by high quality research and shows students' confident use of large scale.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning are outstanding overall.

- Teachers are knowledgeable and assertive, gaining the trust of students through very professional demonstrations and effective use of their own and other students' work. This builds students' confidence and creative aspirations.
- Clear lesson objectives help students focus their effort; in the most effective lessons objectives are precise, subject specific and revisited

through discussion in order to check students' understanding. However, the use of questioning is a variable aspect of teaching; on occasion students are quickly given answers before fully challenged to think for themselves.

- The transformation of outdated accommodation into stimulating environments that contribute to learning reflects the teachers' ability to use display to inform and inspire, and manage resources to promote students' self-organisation.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good with outstanding features at Key Stage 4.

- An excellent range of art, craft and design experiences are provided. Examination groups benefit from opportunities to make choices, develop their strengths and across different courses enrich learning through first hand experiences; visits to art galleries, work with practising artists, craft makers and designers.
- Topics are revisited skilfully to enable students to apply their developing maturity and maintain their high level of interest by introducing different approaches and techniques that contribute to coherence overall. Students and staff value the opportunities to work for long periods of unbroken time.
- Some projects provide students with opportunities to express personal feelings or respond to real problems; work related to personal identity for example shows that students are able to develop a high level of creativity by pursuing individual pathways although this is an inconsistent feature of provision.

Leadership and management

The subject is very well led and managed.

- Subject leadership and management are inspired and efficient and their effectiveness is strengthened by the high standards set by the subject leader. The individual strengths of individual teachers and support staff are valued, deployed effectively and shared collaboratively.
- Self-evaluation is embedded into everyday experience and this establishes a supportive but challenging ethos that welcomes objective evaluation; follow-up to the recommendations of the previous Ofsted inspection has been swift, effective and has enabled an already very good department to improve further.
- Thorough monitoring and evaluation contributes to the clarity and relevance of development planning and prioritisation. The school accurately evaluates the quality of learning as an area in need of further scrutiny in order to complement the sharp focus on teaching that has taken place.

Inclusion

The subject's contribution to the inclusion of students is very good.

- Boys and girls, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, value the high level of support that characterises teaching. Innovative work with primary schools in the area provides individual students with rewarding and reassuring opportunities to move between schools having already experienced a sense of achievement and rapport with their new teachers and peers. Students are quickly integrated and by Year 9 sufficiently confident and competent to start examination courses. The proportion of students choosing art and design courses is significantly higher than national averages.

Subject Focus

- Students show a good understanding about design from contemporary and historical sources. Wide ranging design skills are developed; students are able to apply these particularly well to textiles and graphic media.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to ensure that questioning is consistently used to check students' understanding and promote students' self-evaluation
- to increase opportunities for students to personalise the direction and purpose of their work.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ian Middleton
Her Majesty's Inspector