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Dear Dr R Steward

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme:
Design & Technology (D&T)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 27-28 February 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. 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

Design and Technology

The overall effectiveness of D&T was judged to be satisfactory with some very good features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in D&T are satisfactory overall.

- At the end of Key Stage 3 students' attainment is good, and often very good and all students make good progress across the key stage. Attainment at entry is broadly at national expectation. Students are able to study and produce a good range of textile and food products in line with the national recommendation.
- In last year's GCSE examination, there were a significantly high number of students who gained grades A* and A. The average point score per entry

is exactly the national average but the number of students failing to gain a grade is three times the national average, which is disturbing.

- Boys' results are well below the national average and the failure rate is exceptionally high with 15% of candidates not gaining a grade, three times the national average. Girls' results are exceptionally high, with 3 times as many gaining A* and A grades than average. In addition, the number gaining A*-C grades is significantly higher than the national average as well. For many boys D&T is their worst subject with results significantly lower than their others, but girls often do significantly better than in their other subjects
- Students follow their GCSE course in D&T in a range of materials. Results vary significantly from subject to subject. Subjects, like textiles, do extremely well with very high standards and very good achievement. They contain mainly girls. On the Resistant Materials course, standards are low and achievement is also low. Most of this course contains boys.
- In the Food groups, results were average. The majority of entries were girls, achievement overall was satisfactory. In the graphics group, one third of the group were girls and they significantly outperformed boys. In the Systems and Control group, almost entirely boys, standards were low, as was achievement.
- In the sixth form, Design and Technology: Product Design is studied to AS level with options in textiles or graphic products with materials technology. Results in textiles are much higher than in graphic products. Girls outperform boys significantly, every one passing, with four out of the six entered gaining an A or B grade. Ten boys entered, six gaining a grade but none gaining an A or B grade.
- At A level, all the nine girls on the Textiles course passed, five of them gained A or B grades, very good results. On the Graphics course all students passed, the two girls gaining an A and a B grade whereas the 4 boys gained C or D grades.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

Overall the quality of teaching and learning is good overall.

- The standard of teaching is variable with some that is satisfactory, much that is good, and some that is outstanding. However, there is some unsatisfactory teaching as well.
- In the best lessons not a second is lost. The students arrive and are immediately put to work on a starter task. Often this is one where students work in pairs or teams and have a practical task to complete. For example, in one lesson students had to sort out a pile of different fabrics into three piles looking at how the pattern had been applied. The teacher then used a 'quick fire' set of questions to tease out how the choices had been made and to confirm or challenge the decision. Here all students developed a very good understanding not only of the processes, but also of the properties of different textiles.
- In these lessons too, students' progress was maximised by the teacher being consistently demanding, on the one hand by being supportive and

kind, and on the other by constantly drawing out from the students, and the whole group, maximum effort. Here students made outstanding progress.

- In one of the good lessons, students were encouraged to become examiners, judging pictures of pieces of other students work so that they could identify the qualities that they needed to develop in their own. Here assessment was being used as a tool for learning. Relationships are good and students and teachers work well together and keep on task to the end of the lesson.
- In the poorer lessons, the challenge of the tasks is insufficiently rigorous and the demands made of the student barely adequate. Progress in an examination class was unsatisfactory because the teacher talked too much and the students did too little. This was not helped by the cramped accommodation that forced students to sit too closely together and the absence of quality resources.
- In the sixth form, the students take on far more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers are effective at developing strategies to make students receive criticism of their work in the most constructive manner. An excellent lesson of 'The Dragon's Den' gave students the opportunity to present an idea and receive friendly and helpful advice. The whole session was recorded on video so that students could review their performance and use it to hone their presentational skills, as well as their product.
- Teachers are committed to the school, the students and their subject. There is a very good range of visits and extra-curricular activities and teachers make themselves available to students at lunchtimes and after school.
- Students look forward to coming to D&T to do 'practical things'. When talking to students they said that D&T is getting better year on year.
- There are very strong caring relationships that are strength of the provision. However, sometimes caring masks a need for more rigour in the learning. Behaviour is excellent so that teachers are able to communicate with students very effectively and no time is lost in dealing with any matter of indiscipline. This aids progress.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is often effectively used well in coursework and class work. Homework is set regularly.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good overall.

- In Year 7 the school has commenced an innovative approach as part of its specialist art college status and is running a foundation course that links both art and D&T together. Teachers from both specialisms have developed their expertise so that they can cover all six units of the course themselves so that students stay with them for the whole year. This improves continuity and enables the students to relate far better to their teacher rather than changing them a number of times in the year. Food is taught as part of a course with Physical Education for healthy living.
- The time given to D&T in the first three years is similar to most schools. It

is well used in Years 8 and 9 to provide students with a modular course that builds systematically to cover the National Curriculum. Students cover a series of modules in the production of products in resistant materials, (wood, plastics and metal), food and textiles. There are weaknesses however, in the areas of electronic control technology and the study of structures.

- At Key Stage 4, the choice that students are now given has been reduced to address the issue of raising standards. The choice of GCSE courses is from Resistant Materials, Textile Products and Food Studies. The school is considering the development of vocational courses in response to the introduction of the Diploma programme.
- In the sixth form students can choose courses at AS Level and A2 Level in Product Design using textiles or graphic products with materials technology.
- Students on all courses speak well of their experiences.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management are good.

- D&T as a subject is one that provides a challenge to the school. The working areas are much smaller than the relevant British Standard identifies for 20 students, and often the timetable requirement is that 24 students have to be accommodated. This means that working areas are overcrowded and it is only by the excellent behaviour of students that accidents have so far been avoided. The school needs to review its provision urgently to ensure requirements are fully met.
- Modern and appropriate resources for teaching and learning have been provided, particularly for ICT through the school's specialist school focus. The resources for computer aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) are good but they need to be further improved in graphics.
- The new head of department, is giving good leadership to her team. She sets high standards for teaching and learning and has high expectations. However, more work needs to be done by all the staff to provide a more coherent experience to students in each subject area with consistent standards of teaching and learning.

Inclusion

- Students respect each other, and their teachers, and they all work together in harmony. In lessons, good humour and an eagerness to learn is universally seen and relationships are consistently good. In discussion and evaluation of each other's work there are mature attitudes and an eagerness not to offend, together with sensitivity for each other's feelings.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- significantly raising boys' achievement at examination level by ensuring that the full specification of the examination board is covered, that

coursework is produced, and assessed, effectively in the resistant materials, graphic products and electronics courses

- improving the challenge, pace and rigour of teaching and learning across the department to ensure that all of the teaching is as good as the best
- as finances permit, improve accommodation for D&T.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T in the school.

A copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Lyons
Additional Inspector