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Mr P Lidstone
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Dear Mr Lidstone

Ofsted 2007-08 subject survey inspection programme: Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 1-2 May to look at work in Design and Technology (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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Attainment and achievement are excellent.

- Students' attainment on entry is broadly average in D&T. They make good progress and standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are well above average. Almost all students follow a D&T subject to GCSE examination level.
- At the end of Key Stage 4, D&T is one of the best performing subjects in the school. Students' attainment at GCSE level is outstanding, with many achieving the highest grades A and A*. Sixth form students also achieve very well. Last year at A2 level, all 18 students passed, over half of them gaining an A or B grade.

- Sensitive approaches to support enable students with learning difficulties and looked after students to achieve extremely well.
- Students' personal development is excellent, particularly their economic understanding. They work systematically as independent learners and have an excellent awareness of hygiene and health and safety issues. In groups and in pairs, they collaborate well.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning in D&T is very good.

- Teaching and learning is never less than good, and is often outstanding. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and establish good relationships with students. Teachers have high expectations and a consistent approach to designing and making work of quality. Students come to lessons ready and willing to learn. They listen well to their teachers, complete interesting tasks and are rightly proud of the products they take home. They say that their parents are impressed too!
- Students with individual special needs are very well catered for and supported by the effective deployment of skilled teaching assistants.
- At Key Stage 4, and in the sixth form, teachers use their specialist knowledge to prepare students well for examinations and ensure students' project work fully meets requirements. As a result students achieve very high grades in their coursework. Teaching to support students' revision programmes is challenging, interesting and active.
- Sixth form teaching is excellent. Students join the course from different schools with a very wide range of prior experiences. Good teaching quickly establishes effective and collaborative groups of learners who are highly supportive of each other. There is an air of business like enjoyment in these lessons. Theory, the skills of designing and manufacturing are combined to enable students to design products that are innovative and of commercial quality.
- Effective tracking systems monitor students' progress closely. However, because the school could do more to identify each student's strengths and weakness in D&T on entry to the school it is not as effective as it might be. Students are well supported to self and peer assess and to set challenging targets to improve their performance.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- All students are valued and have equal access to the D&T curriculum. Students receive a broad and balanced D&T curriculum in Years 7 and 8. Specialisation in Year 9, prepares students well for later examination courses. However, the current approach is unbalanced in its approach to developing students' skills to design, make, test and evaluate.
- Provision of design and technology and engineering courses at Key Stage 4 and at sixth form level is rich in breadth and depth. Provision is

enhanced by additional opportunities for students to study vocational engineering qualifications alongside GCSEs and for able students to study additional professional qualifications in food hygiene and Computer-Aided Engineering. Enrichment of the curriculum is good; an extensive range of extra-curricular activities enables students to explore further their interests in D&T.

- Technology College funding is used well to provide extensive D&T outreach work to local primary schools. Many current students benefited from this and it helps to support excellent designing skills.

Leadership and management of D&T

The effectiveness of leadership and management of D&T across the school is outstanding.

- D&T is very well supported and its continuing development and sharing of good practice across the school is prioritised highly by senior leaders.
- Departmental leadership and co-ordination of Key Stage 3 is excellent. A consistent focus on teaching and learning has driven this large department forward to its current high standards.
- Although teachers meet regularly as a faculty, key staff improve courses individually so there is an absence of a whole faculty approach. Attendance too can also be inconsistent. The department is in two halves a distance apart, which hinders consultation.

The extent to which the D&T department is prepared for the Key Stage 3 and 14-19 curriculum changes:

- The school is adequately prepared for the new National Curriculum for Year 7 that starts in September. The development of the school's specialism is promoting further drive and refinement of the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing the use of baseline data and the setting of targets to make learning even more effective
- consolidating and developing the curriculum in particular in Year 9 to ensure the all students gain a balance in every year of the skills of designing, making, testing and evaluating.

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

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

Andrew Lyons
Additional Inspector