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Mr T Johnson
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Dear Mr Johnson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – D&T

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 3-4 March 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 six lessons.

Design and Technology

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in D&T are broadly satisfactory.

- Students, when they enter the school, have only a limited prior experience of D&T and are hazy about what it is that they have learnt. In Key Stage 3, they follow a series of modules so that they design and make products in resistant materials (wood, metal and plastics), simple systems and control, structures and food. At the end of the key stage they have covered most of the National Curriculum although their experience and understanding of electronic systems and control, modern and 'Smart' materials, is very limited. At the end of Key Stage 3 their standards are

broadly in line with national expectation although too many of their products look similar to those made by other students. Generally they make satisfactory progress although their designing skills are not as well developed as their making skills. This is restricted by their graphic and communication skills that have been insufficiently developed to aid the design process. The schools' assessment system significantly overstates the students' attainment.

- Students are able to study and produce a good range of textile products in their Art lessons, together with food products in D&T, in line with the national recommendation.
- Over half the students follow a D&T subject to examination level. In the GCSE examination, results last year were significantly below the national average at both A* to C and A* to G grades. The number of students gaining a pass grade is broadly in line with the national average. Girls' results are better than those of the boys, but significantly worse than those in most schools. Students do less well in their D&T examinations than they do in most of their other subjects. The results vary depending on the subject followed. In both in the Food Studies and the Resistant Materials examination all candidates gained a grade, with 36% of them gaining an A* to C grade, well below that national average. Results in both Graphic Products, and in Electronics, were much lower.
- Seven lower attaining students successfully entered and were awarded a grade in the Entry Level certificate in Design and Technology.
- The recently introduced BTEC course, Construction in the Built Environment (worth 4 GCSEs), is run in conjunction with the local College. It has been very successful with 10 of the 11 students gaining 4 GCSE passes at C grade or above.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

Overall the quality of teaching and learning is broadly satisfactory.

- Generally teaching is satisfactory and there is some good teaching. The occasional unsatisfactory lesson was seen. The full time teachers in the department are supplemented by experienced part-time teachers who have returned from retirement to support the school as it has found it difficult in recruiting and employing full time qualified teachers.
- Most teachers have a good technical knowledge of the subject content, but many work in their 'comfort zone' and are not covering the curriculum widely enough to meet the demands of the subject.
- There is too little rigour in both the teaching and learning. For example, in the examination classes, assessment criteria are too infrequently used to challenge and direct learning. In the BTEC class, where the assessment criteria are constantly at the forefront of both the teachers' and the learners' thinking, the pace of the lesson is high and the challenge accepted readily by the students. Here they achieve well.
- Teaching would be better if it were helped by detailed and relevant schemes of work, and effective teachers' lesson plans. These could

provide more challenge, enabling the students to learn better. Teachers have good relationships with the students, and behaviour in the lessons is most often good.

- At the beginning of the lesson the challenge to be undertaken is not clearly expressed so that students do not know what to do to achieve. Too often students simply carry on from where they left off last time. The underlying principles, and the more theoretical aspects of D&T, particularly in the examination classes, are not built into the lessons sufficiently. In consequence, students are not being prepared for the examination portion of their GCSE course adequately. This lowers standards.
- There are exceptions. The well-constructed booklets in Food Studies for Key Stage 3 stimulate learners and set targets for completion. Here expectations are clearly established. This raises standards.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is broadly satisfactory, being better at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3.

- In the first three years the time given to D&T is similar to most schools. A series of modules is taught covering manufacturing products in wood, some metal and plastics; food technology; and structures with some graphic input. These are supported by some use of computer aided design (CAD) although the computer aided manufacturing (CAM) has to be done by the technician. However, the coverage of electronic systems and control together with modern and 'Smart' materials, is very limited. Often the tasks that pupils perform are too teacher directed so that the range of work produced is very limited. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 needs updating that brings it firmly into line with the requirements of the new National Curriculum that starts in September.
- Throughout every year textiles is taught within Art and Design.
- At Key Stage 4 there is a good range of D&T subjects at GCSE level including Food Studies, Resistant Materials, Electronics, and Graphic Products. The school has, in the last few years, formed a link with the local College and has started a link BTEC course. This has proved to be very successful and students speak very highly of it. Because of the way the course is structured, students of all abilities are able to progress well, including those who hold statements of special educational need.
- In discussions with students in every year they commented that they enjoyed their D&T lessons because they enjoy practical subjects. However, one student commented that the GCSE course was not well taught.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management at whole school level are satisfactory but within the D&T department there are significant weaknesses in leadership.

- The head teacher and senior management team are working hard with the departmental management to raise standards and provide a quality provision. Thus far they have only been partially successful due to the difficulty in recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified and experienced staff. A fundamental review of the provision is required to ensure that all the departmental staff are working together as a team despite their physical separation. The food rooms are in a separate part of the school and the links between staff and resources made difficult to manage.
- There is very good support from the technicians and other non-teaching staff.
- Standards of teaching need to be made more consistent. The strategies for supporting and improving learning that have been developed in the food area should be shared and used as a model by all.
- Currently the demands placed on students in some classes are too low and the expectation of the range and quality of their work is too limited. Similarly, the curriculum is insufficiently challenging in some areas. There is much to do if the introduction of a scheme to meet the requirements of the new National Curriculum programmes of study is in place for next September.

Inclusion

- This school is very sensitive to the needs of its students. It has developed a range of ways that support students who come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds, who speak 23 home languages, and together with a relatively high number of students with special educational needs. It meets all their needs well. In lessons, the support for students is very effective and many teachers are particularly sensitive to the needs of those who need additional help. Students with special educational needs are well integrated into the life of the class; they make similar progress to the rest of the group. Students' relationships are very good and the school is an open and caring community where all are respected. The relatively high number of looked after children, including unaccompanied asylum seekers, are given appropriate help and guidance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising the quality and rigour of teaching and assessment to improve achievement, assess students' work regularly and accurately to inform them how to make better progress
- improve the range and quality of the curriculum to make lessons' challenging, meeting the full requirements of the National Curriculum, and giving students a wide range of tasks that stretch their thinking and designing skills so that they make products of real quality that will proudly take home
- developing subject leadership to motivate and develop a team that produces the level of change required.

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