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Mr Lowe
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lowe

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17-18 November 2008 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 D&T work in lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average.

- Students start in Year 7 with average skills and abilities in D&T. They make satisfactory progress and standards are average overall by the end of Year 11. GCSE results have fluctuated widely in the last three years from below to above average. A significant proportion of girls did not do as well as boys in 2007 although un-validated 2008 data shows girls performance has improved. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) achieve equally as well as other groups of students.
- The variation in GCSE results across the specialist areas is exceptionally wide, from well below average in graphics to above average in food

technology. School data shows the proportion of higher GCSEs gained in 2008 was significantly lower than 2007. Evidence from the visit indicates a similar decline in achievement and standards at Key Stage 3. The school knows this and is starting to take action, for example introducing a tracking system and developing the use of self evaluation.

- D&T is making a sound contribution to the personal development of students who say they enjoy practical activities and taking responsibility for their own project work.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- The school accurately evaluates teaching and learning to be satisfactory. Much of the learning is based on project outcomes which are insufficiently well coordinated to systematically develop D&T capability over time, particularly at Key Stage 3. As a result, Students are not challenged as well as they could be to think through their own design work.
- Lessons are effectively planned and delivered against a background of limited storage facilities for materials and project work, particularly in resistant materials. Work is assessed and performance in different aspects of the subject is aggregated into an overall score. Insufficient use is made of this information, for example students do not always know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve at Key Stage 3.

Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is effectively planned to encourage practical work. Students experience a variety of activities across the specialist areas. Schemes of work encourage coverage of designing and making although delivery is not guaranteed. In particular making skills such as precision, accuracy and high standards of finish are inconsistent.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is constructed to meet GCSE course requirements based on a longstanding range of projects. The management of learning resources and the environment is inconsistent across the specialist areas restricting the use of the full range of up-to-date tools, equipment and the use of industry related contexts for project work.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

- The use of monitoring and self evaluation to make improvements in D&T is a recent development in the subject. Both are starting to provide a more accurate picture of the department's strengths and areas for development. The monitoring of performance in the subject has a higher priority and the actions required to make sure D&T thrives and improves are being identified.

The extent to which inequality and stereotyping are tackled in D&T

- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make equal progress and action is taken to minimise gaps in performance between the different groups of students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising achievement and standards by making results across the specialist areas more consistent
- more effective use of assessment information to identify underachievement
- challenging students to think through their own design work at an earlier age.

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

As explained in the previous letter, 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

Paul Hancock
Her Majesty's Inspector