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Mrs C Weaver
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Weaver

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 26-27 January 2009 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 pupils, scrutiny of departmental documentation, analysis of students' work and the observation of five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards overall are satisfactory overall but with definite strengths.

- Students enter the school with average attainment and many leave in Year 11 achieving GCSE results in D&T that are broadly average. However, the number of students achieving A*-A grades is well above the national average. Students who studied BTEC construction all achieved the equivalent of a C grade or above.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) achieve exceptionally well. A range of support from teachers ensures they are clear about how to carry out effective research, planning and

evaluation in GCSE coursework. There is not always sufficient challenge for higher attaining students.

- Boys achieve better than boys do nationally and slightly better than girls in the school. This is because at Key Stage 3 many of the projects in product design are more attractive to boys than girls. Hence, fewer girls opt for D&T subjects.
- Students' personal development is outstanding. Students enjoy practical work and their relationships with staff and each other are excellent. Thus, even in classrooms which are cramped, students' behaviour is good. Students support each others' learning; they have constructive discussions and cooperate well in practical work. There is a purposeful atmosphere in all rooms. By the end of Year 9 students can carry out a wide range of food work independently which equips them well for their future well being.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use to good effect when supporting students in class. The department has standardised lesson plans which help with consistency in teaching. In the outstanding lessons there is a high degree of independent working and students respond well to teachers' high expectations of them. Work is challenging and effective support is provided which does not detract from students' sense of achievement and enjoyment. Teachers' questioning is highly effective and moves learning on quickly. In these lessons students produce a wide range of highly individual and imaginative solutions to the tasks set them. Students particularly like to use computer aided design and manufacture because it gives them a high quality finish. They are highly motivated and clear about what they need to do to develop their work further.
- Assessment and marking varies throughout the department. When it is most effective students are clear about the level they are working towards and understand what to do to improve their work.
- Practical skills are taught well and staff are confident in planning and teaching for examination courses. Good guidance is given to students during lessons. Students appreciate teachers help and the extra support they provide at lunchtimes and after school.

Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum meets requirements. Teachers have begun to plan to meet the new national requirements. Overall there is appropriate progression of practical capability within courses. However, designing capability is not clearly thought through. Design decisions are too

simplistic and this limits progression and at times slows learning. National Curriculum levels are not mapped against schemes of work and thus teachers are not secure that their planning meets the needs of higher attaining students.

- Students see relevance in the skills and knowledge they learn in D&T. The introduction of vocational courses has increased choices available to students. The school is appropriately encouraging more girls to opt for BTEC construction. Projects in resistant materials are not appealing to girls. The department recognises this and is taking appropriate steps to rectify this.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

- The senior management team and head of department have a clear shared view of the strengths and areas for development in D&T. The experiences it provides for students are valued. This perspective underpins the support and developments planned for the department.
- The head of department has a vision and passion for the subject which drives his willingness to try new things.
- Health and safety are secured, technician support is good and staff expertise is effectively deployed.

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

- The department has correctly identified the stereotypical choices made by boys and girls at Key Stage 4. There are appropriate plans to challenge preconceptions and so encourage equal numbers of boys and girls to opt for different material areas. Students' views are appropriately informing these developments.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that students' designing skills are developed systematically throughout Key Stage 3 to ensure good progression and better support for Key Stage 4 courses
- tackling the inconsistencies in assessment practice by ensuring that all students understand what level they are working towards and are clear about what they need to do to improve. In so doing ensure that assessment opportunities are built into teachers' planning
- ensuring greater challenge for higher attaining students by ensuring that teachers' planning and schemes of work provide sufficient opportunities for developing students' critical thinking.

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

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector