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Miss C McCann
Headteacher
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Dear Miss McCann

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 12-13 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 students, scrutiny of departmental documentation, analysis of students' work and the observation of six lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards overall are outstanding.

- Students enter the school with below average attainment in D&T and make outstanding progress. In 2008, 73% of students gained A*-C GCSE grades in the subject, this was much better than students did nationally.
- At Key Stage 3 in 2008 students exceeded the College's targets for attaining Level 5 and above, and Level 6 and above.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) achieve exceptionally well. Rigorous and systematic support ensures students' individual needs are met, especially for literacy, and enables them to cope with the research, planning and evaluation demands of GCSE coursework. This, together with the high degree of personalised learning enables students to succeed.

- Students' personal development is outstanding. Students work in a mature fashion in lessons. This promotes students' progress ensuring they gain the most from activities during lessons as no time is wasted. Effective group work encourages all students to share their ideas enabling them to effectively tackle problems together.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning overall is good.

- Lessons are good overall, with some outstanding features. Teachers ensure that the pace of learning is appropriate. Relationships are good. Because of this students are encouraged to talk through tasks and ideas. Teachers set appropriately high expectations of behaviour and learning at the beginning of lessons and students rise to the challenges they are given.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is used well to inspire students. Careful planning ensures that an appropriate range of strategies maintain students' interest and their high level of involvement in lesson activities. Students carry out practical tasks well. Assessment practices ensure that students are clear about the level they have attained. However, whilst marking carefully explains the next stage in students' work and most students use this information effectively in deciding their next steps, a minority of students need more support to make best use of this feedback.
- Students enjoy D&T. They particularly like practical activities: they believe they learn better through 'doing' and can do well. One student said "D&T staff are very good at supporting and helping".

Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum has some good and indeed outstanding features but is satisfactory overall. This is because in tailoring the curriculum to meet student preferences the college does not provide opportunities for students to develop knowledge and skills in using resistant materials during Key Stage 3. This limits the opportunities for students to gain the full breadth of experience in D&T. In particular there are insufficient opportunities for students to assess products in terms of their sustainability. Appropriate plans are in place to introduce systems and control from September 2009.
- The 'Widening Horizons' course in Year 7 contributes well to the development of students' critical thinking and independent working in D&T. Strong links are forged with other subjects and further strengthened in Year 8. In these lessons students develop confidence in making decisions and applying their own ideas in their work.
- Curriculum provision at Key Stage 4 is good with outstanding features. The D&T options are changed annually to meet the particular needs and

preferences of the year group. Students say that the improved choice helps them to follow their career interests and to progress into the sixth form.

- The College's commitment to the local 14-19 partnership ensures that students aged from 14 upwards have a wide choice of vocational courses. Students talked with enthusiasm about recently introduced BTEC courses and their success in them.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are good.

- D&T is seen as an important subject by all senior leaders. They are enthusiastic about the work of the department and supportive of the developments within it. This allows the curriculum leader to be imaginative about initiatives in D&T.
- The curriculum leader has a clear vision for the subject. Her good understanding of the department's strengths and weaker areas enable her to plan effectively the next stage in its development. Her good leadership has supported staff in taking up the challenge of teaching new subjects and working flexibly within the North Liverpool collaborative. Health and safety are secured, technician support is good and all staff work effectively as a team.

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

- A small number of girls study engineering as a result of the wide subject choice in Years 10 to 13. Students see the college as a haven where they are valued and feel secure. Inclusive practices are clearly demonstrated in D&T.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- Develop assessment and improve progression further by ensuring all students can make good use of feedback from marking.
- Extend the curriculum at Key Stage 3 to ensure there is sufficient breadth of study through introducing tasks and assignments using resistant materials.

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