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Mr D Atton
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Dear Mr Atton

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 March 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are broadly in line with average by the end of Year 11.

- Students enter the school with broadly average attainment. They develop sound practical skills in a range of materials and work with increasing confidence and independence. By the end of Year 9 students can confidently cook healthy meals for themselves. However lower attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not make as much progress as other groups and their work is often incomplete.
- By the end of Year 11, students' achievement in D&T is generally in line with their performance in other subjects at GCSE. However, there is much variability in standards and in students' achievement between courses and few students achieve the highest grades.
- Boy's attainment, which was much worse than that of girls, has improved.

- D&T makes a sound contribution to students' personal development. Students enjoy using tools and equipment and acquiring practical skills. They work safely in lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall.

- Teachers' knowledge of materials and processes is strong and is used to best effect in specialist courses. Relationships between teachers and students are productive and good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning characterise all lessons. Students learn how to make products effectively from teachers' practical demonstrations. However booklets and worksheets are insufficiently adapted at Key Stage 3 to meet the needs of all students.
- Good features of teaching include well planned opportunities to engage students in discussion about designers and innovative products and the teaching of specific techniques to enable students to analyse products. In these lessons students became animated, giving their views about products and drawing effectively upon their own experience to identify well designed features of new products. Such good practice is not yet consistent across D&T.
- Teachers use computers well in lessons and create useful resources to support learning. Students use computers to do basic tasks. Opportunities for them to undertake more complex modelling, particularly using computer aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM), are needed to increase the challenge and relevance of D&T work, particularly at Key Stage 3.
- Pupils are provided with sound individual feedback on how well they are doing and what can be done to improve their work.

Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Recent changes to the organisation and planning of Key Stage 3 have brought some stability and coherence to the programme of work. Further opportunities to bring the separate material areas together and to develop the essential skills students need to manage projects independently would usefully help to prepare students for the next stage of learning.
- Key Stage 4 courses meet the needs and interests of students. Students say D&T provides them with useful life skills.
- Many students' take advantage of after school activities to complete their coursework. Opportunities for students to work with designers, engineers and chefs and to experience the challenge of working with clients are limited.

- Specialist technology college resources are used well to support primary school teachers in teaching D&T and to develop primary pupils' confidence in using tools, especially CAD/CAM.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

- Senior leaders value D&T and this is demonstrated in their investment in leadership support and resources. Senior staff know the strengths and weaknesses of the subject well. Actions taken by senior leaders and a collegiate approach to the management of D&T underpin the improvements in boys' progress and curriculum provision. However, such action has yet to demonstrate a consistent impact on students' attainment and achievement overall.
- Departmental procedures for tracking students' progress and evaluating teaching and learning do not adequately provide the collegiate managers with sufficient information to identify precisely the impact they are having or where further improvements are needed.
- A vision for D&T and collaboration between the technology subjects are underdeveloped.

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

- Excellent progress has been made to narrow the gap between the performance of boys and girls. New courses have successfully encouraged more girls to study product design and boys to study food technology post 14. However stereotypical attitudes to designing products are evident in students' work and are insufficiently challenged by teachers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring rigour in tracking students' progress and monitoring and evaluation practices to improve the quality of the department's work
- ensuring all students are challenged and that lessons consistently meet their learning needs
- developing a shared vision for D&T in a specialist technology college and extending opportunities for students to work with clients, designers, engineers and chefs
- raising students' awareness of stereotyping and their responsibility as designers to challenge it.

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

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector
Subject Adviser for Design and Technology