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Mr D Howell
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Dear Mr Howell

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 8-9 July 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 you, the subject leader for D&T, 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

Standards and achievement are satisfactory overall.

- Most students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. Their making skills are stronger than designing and by the end of Key Stage 3 students develop a good understanding of how to use a wide range of tools and equipment. Their technical craft skills are good and students make good progress to develop a secure understanding of basic characteristics of materials and techniques and a high level of practical skills. They can assemble electronic components and follow instructions safely and are acquiring an understanding of nutrition and the impact of dietary choices on their health. Students understanding of specialist technical vocabulary and their awareness of engineers and designers and products and inventions in the past and present are weak.

- Attainment at Key Stage 4 is broadly in line with average. However there is a mixed picture of attainment across courses with strengths in engineering, construction and graphics. Few students achieved the expectations the school had of them in 2008 and the gap between boys and girls attainment at GCSE is significantly wide. Issues around the quality and completion of coursework lie behind the high 5% failure rate.
- Students' attainment and progress in advanced Level Engineering is broadly satisfactory.
- D&T makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They enjoy D&T and are proud of their work. Their behaviour is good and they use tools and complex equipment safely in lessons. Older students enjoy making products based on their own ideas and are confident in using the skills they learn at home and school to cook a meal.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall.

- Teachers' management of practical lessons and their specialist knowledge of examination requirements and technical skills and techniques in using materials are good. They combine their expertise well with effective demonstrations and questioning skills. Students like to learn in this way.
- The quality of planning is varied. A lack of specific learning objectives in lessons together with teaching about research and investigation techniques, planning and testing that is insufficiently matched to challenge the more able students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities, characterises the weaker elements of lessons.
- At Key Stage 4 students say they enjoy learning the theory behind engineering. They are proud of the extensive coursework portfolios they create for assessment. Assessment is satisfactory.
- Resources and accommodation are very good and support teaching and learning very well.

Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- A wide range of courses characterises the provision of D&T at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Such courses link well to progression routes and enable many students to remain in education and move onto further training and employment. Students enjoy the courses and using their own ideas, they say courses surpass their expectations and they make greater use of computer aided designing and making.
- The school's schemes of work meet requirements although expectations are too low in relation to textiles and some graphics units of work. Opportunities for students to use materials that are responsive to their environment, to analyse and disassemble products to develop an

understanding of how they work, and to learn about the work of designers and engineers are thinly covered.

- The school has recently sought to improve the provision of food technology and early signs show this is beginning to have an impact on pupils understanding of ingredients and techniques.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

- Your support and that of governors for D&T is well demonstrated in the challenge and support for improvement and in the impact investment has had in improving the quality of provision and resources. This has enabled the department to introduce new courses and to modernise facilities.
- The subject leader and staff are developing as confident and reflective practitioners. Plans to improve provision for D&T are clearly focussed and actions to underpin the priorities appear appropriate.

The extent to which the school promotes awareness and relevance of D&T to students and parents and carers

- Senior leaders have a developing vision for D&T.
- Students' views have informed decisions about the organisation of Key Stage 3.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring students are challenged and appropriately and have opportunities to develop higher level skills in graphics and textile products and to use materials that respond to the environment
- improving opportunities to enable Key Stage 3 students to develop their understanding of the application of engineering skills in a wide range of exciting contexts.

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