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Mr G Sammons
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Dear Mr Sammons

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: design and technology (D&T)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2 and 3 November 2009 to look at work in D&T.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on how the school promotes awareness and relevance of D&T to students and their parents, and the extent to which their views contribute to the school's evaluation of 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 included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Standards reached in D&T overall are slightly below those found nationally. However, the proportion of students achieving GCSE A* to C grades in resistant materials and engineering is above average. There is a trend of improving attainment overall in both key stages. There have also been significant recent improvements in graphics, electronics and textiles. Attainment in food technology remains well below average.

- All students study a technology subject into Year 11 and undertake a broad range of designing and making activities. Standards are broadly average on entry and students make satisfactory progress overall. While progress in most areas is satisfactory or better, progress in food technology is poor.

Quality of teaching of D&T

The quality of teaching is satisfactory.

- Relationships between students and teachers are good. Students say that most staff are approachable and supportive and there is 'always someone who can help you'.
- Students receive high-quality feedback from most teachers as to how to improve coursework. This is supported with a comprehensive series of clinics, to develop knowledge further, scheduled regularly after school.
- Students use the highly structured framework provided for design with good effect. This does restrict creativity at times but teachers are increasingly developing opportunities for creativity and independent work, with some students producing high-quality and innovative design solutions.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The wide range of courses and qualifications at Key Stage 4 is adequately matched to students' needs and interests. Most students are pleased with the courses, and access to resources is planned well.
- The schemes of work provide a satisfactory overview of the aspects to be covered, but do not always ensure a relevant context for learning or clear learning objectives, focusing on what students will do rather than what they will learn.
- The school is aware that gifted and talented students need to be challenged further and that lessons need a wider range of strategies to support the range of abilities more effectively. Where this has been implemented effectively, students appreciate the more personalised experience and make better progress, producing highly creative work of very high quality.
- Partnership arrangements with industry, including the school's good quality-assurance procedures, are helping to develop the Diploma course in engineering to good effect. The course offers students an increasing relevance and context to their learning.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

Leadership and management in D&T are satisfactory.

- There is a clear vision for D&T and how it contributes to learning across the school. The head of faculty and senior team have accurately analysed

strengths that they are building upon and areas for development that are being tackled systematically.

- The improvement in attainment and teaching as well as the development of the new Diploma in engineering reflects the support and challenge for D&T provided by senior managers.
- The school is aware of the need to ensure significant improvements with the food technology provision. This area has some particular weaknesses in the daily management of resources and the monitoring of students' progress that are not evident in the good practice in other areas of the department.

The school promotes awareness and relevance of D&T to students and parents well.

- Students see the relevance of D&T to life skills and careers. They generally enjoy learning in D&T, particularly the hands-on experiences. They want to design and make products that are personally useful and are critical of the lack of relevance of some of the projects they are asked to undertake.
- The school promotes D&T well with a wide range of projects, competitions and activities that develop D&T experiences beyond lessons. One project involved a wide range of students working in teams to create 'House Gardens' imaginatively developing areas of the school. The school also produces high-quality publications for the local community and parents to encourage people to think further about technology and develop the technology college ethos.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- planning with greater precision so that teaching matches the wide range of students' abilities
- ensuring even greater challenge and more opportunities for creativity and independent work, by extending the existing good practice with some of the more able students
- monitoring the daily management and leadership of food technology effectively to raise standards significantly and ensure that provision is more consistent with that found in the rest of the department.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paul Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector