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Mrs B Clubley
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Dear Mrs Clubley

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 16 and 17 November 2009 to look at work in D&T.

As outlined in our 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 students and staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment on entry to the school is well below average. D&T examination results have risen and fallen over the last three years although standards by the end of Key Stage 4 have remained below average.

- The quality of students' learning in relation to their starting points is satisfactory overall. The current progress of students in Years 10 and 11 is good and attainment is satisfactory. All students are learning how to use computers in more challenging ways to aid designing and making. Older students are developing more competence because the speed with which they can work when using such tools enables them to learn from mistakes and ultimately to produce work of a higher professional quality. However, many are at early stages in developing independence and understanding of designing and making to demonstrate the innovation required to achieve at the highest levels.
- D&T contributes satisfactorily to students' personal development; most students are developing positive attitudes to learning and, in Years 10 and 11, show a determination to work hard to achieve qualifications.

Quality of teaching of D&T

The quality of teaching of D&T is satisfactory.

- Teachers apply their specialist skills well to develop students' understanding of materials, tools and processes. Where teaching is effective, teachers modify and tailor learning to meet group and individual learning needs well. Learning is reviewed regularly and moves at a quick pace. Support in the best lessons prompts students' thinking but staff are careful not to take over. The school recognises in their plans a need to improve the overall quality of teaching. An over-emphasis on following instructions rather than teaching students different methods to research, create ideas, develop and plan their work constrains their achievement at the higher levels in both key stages.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Students know their targets but their understanding of what they need to do to reach their target level is unclear to many. Advice and guidance to Key Stage 4 students is focused more sharply on what they need to do to improve their coursework and students trust their teachers' advice and guidance.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

The quality of the D&T curriculum is inadequate.

- The scheme of work is incomplete at Key Stage 4 and in terms of learning about electronics and microprocessor control systems at Key Stage 3. Medium-term planning is inconsistent and projects do not build securely upon each other to ensure all students progressively acquire the skills and knowledge they need to work confidently and independently at Key Stage 4. While such plans demonstrate what students will do, some do not focus sufficiently on what they will learn. Consequently they are not as helpful to teachers as they might be in promoting students' progress.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

Leadership and management in D&T are satisfactory.

- The challenge and support of senior leaders are bringing improvements and this is demonstrated in a consistent approach to lesson planning and monitoring of teaching. Investments to secure small class sizes and provision of computer-aided design and manufacture are promoting students' interest in D&T.
- Leadership at subject level ensures due consideration is given to health and safety and management of resources. However, D&T remains a collection of individual parts and too little attention has been given to secure a collaborative and coordinated approach to curriculum planning. D&T development plans identify essential priorities for improvement but some actions lack sufficient detail to underpin them and ensure staff are clear about what to do to secure improvement.

The school satisfactorily promotes awareness and relevance of D&T

- Most students enjoy D&T and consider it relevant to gaining a qualification, life skills and specialist careers. Students' views are used to make modifications to some projects.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring the curriculum is planned coherently, so that teaching builds securely on students' earlier learning and progress
- ensuring students are taught a range of methods to enable them to securely and progressively develop the skills they need to manage their own learning and work with greater independence at both key stages
- ensuring that support and advice at Key Stage 3 is clearly focused so that all students understand precisely what they need to do to reach their target level.

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

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector