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Mr C Clarke
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Clarke

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 11 and 12 March 2010 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff, parents and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is good.

Achievement in D&T

Students' achievement in D&T is good.

- Students enter the school with above average attainment and achieve results in line with expectations by the end of Year 9. Generally students' attainment in D&T at Key Stage 3 is below that in their other subjects and their progress is slowed by relatively weaker designing skills compared with making. An emphasis on developing design ideas in some of the revised modules of work shows a promising start to tackle this. Around half of the students continue to study D&T at Key Stage 4. They make

good progress and a solid trend of well-above average attainment is firmly established in each D&T course. Small numbers of sixth-form students choose to continue to study advanced courses in D&T and most do so successfully to achieve qualifications and continue to higher education.

- Students make good progress in lessons and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make very good progress. Students enjoy and are proud of their work and their achievements in acquiring 'Taste for Success' awards. They demonstrate very good health, safety and hygiene practices. D&T makes a satisfactory contribution to students' awareness of culture and socially responsible design.

Quality of teaching of D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- Teachers' knowledge of specialist focus areas are highly regarded by students. Excellent relationships between staff and students lead to a supportive learning environment. Teachers' management of lessons and complex equipment are excellent. In the best practice, teachers listen to and question students during lessons and modify tasks and explanations to improve learning and promote their good progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make high-quality work in food and textiles as a result of the expert support they receive.
- Most students know the next steps to take in their examination work and are aware of their current levels and targets. Key Stage 3 assessment is less clear. Students do not know what to do to reach the next level and teachers' criteria to judge students is insufficiently referenced to the module of work.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

The quality of the curriculum in D&T is satisfactory.

- The scheme of work is adequately structured. However, separate curriculum planning of the material areas at Key Stage 3 leads to gaps and thin coverage of the national curriculum and duplication in other areas. Together with planning in some modules which focuses on what students will do rather than what they will learn, this does not support progression or assessment sufficiently. New modules of work introduced in resistant materials and graphics are beginning to develop D&T capability in a structured way and are proving popular and more challenging with Year 9 students.
- Students enjoy their examination courses and show great commitment to completing coursework. Enrichment of the curriculum through competitions, trips and visits and opportunities to benefit the local community are promoted well through textiles, food and catering courses.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

Leadership and management in D&T are good.

- Leaders are focused on developing provision and promoting students' achievement. Both leaders have an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses in the parts of D&T that they are responsible for. Actions to secure improvement have moved forward quickly following the appointment of a new leader and are starting to impact positively on the quality of students' work in all key stages. Leaders demonstrate a clear knowledge of what is needed for the further development and improvement of D&T. School plans to tackle the large class sizes are well advanced.

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

Awareness and relevance of D&T to students and parents are satisfactory.

- Parents and students are positive about the breadth of designing and making opportunities and see relevance in D&T to life skills, careers and higher-level qualifications. The quality and sufficiency of resources for computer-aided design and manufacture negatively affects decisions about pursuing further study in some parts of the subject.
- The vision and aims for D&T are not shared by the two leaders.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing and sharing widely a common vision for D&T and the difference the subject aims to make to students
- ensuring all students know precisely what they need to do to reach the next level at Key Stage 3 and how the levels relate to what they know, understand and are expected to do in their work
- ensuring the curriculum is planned collaboratively to promote progression and meet the National Curriculum requirements.

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

As I explained previously, 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