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Mr D Chapman
Principal
Okehampton College
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Dear Mr Chapman

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 with my colleague, Paul Scott HMI, on 25 and 26 February 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 students, staff and governors, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of 14 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is outstanding.

Achievement in D&T

Students' achievement in D&T is outstanding.

- Most students enter the school with attainment that is at or below the national average. Most students reach or exceed the expectations for their age by the end of Key Stage 3. Almost all students take a GCSE in D&T and a large majority attains at least a grade C. The proportion of students attaining A* or A and A* to C grades is significantly above the national averages. Students' performance in D&T is also significantly higher

compared to that of other subjects in the college. In the sixth form, there is an increasing take-up of courses with notable successes, with good retention and completion rates.

- Excellent student behaviour and attitudes to learning are firmly encouraged by enthusiastic and hard-working staff. This cooperative learning environment ensures that students enjoy what they are doing and generally end each module with work that is completed to a high standard.
- In the round, students' progress in D&T is outstanding, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, due to highly effective support and guidance. D&T makes an excellent contribution to the personal development of students and their well-being.

Quality of teaching of D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge that they share with students effectively. Computer-aided design and manufacture is used well to reinforce learning and to ensure that students are aware of and have first-hand experience of up-to-date manufacturing processes in all year groups.
- End-of-project assessments ensure that students know the National Curriculum level that they have attained, how they can improve their work, and how to reach the next level.
- In lessons, adults sometimes dominate the learning of students in Years 7 to 10. This restricts students' reflection on learning and constricts their ability to make their own choices about designing and making.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- A wide range of types and levels of courses successfully meets the needs of students in Years 10 to 13. The completion of the new skills centre in September will greatly enhance the quality of the delivery of vocational courses such as bricklaying and construction. The plans to include other vocational courses, such as motor vehicle mechanics, are well founded to build on students' interests.
- The school's new 'core module' in Years 7 and 8 is exemplary. It encompasses all D&T requirements while also making mathematics, history, socioeconomic issues and sustainability 'come to life' in a meaningful and holistic way.
- The 'STEM' club has had an impressive impact. Students have managed to raise the profile of energy issues, resulting in a significant reduction in the amount of imported electricity to the college as well as helping local primary schools and the local community to secure their own renewable energy sources and reduce consumption.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

Leadership and management in D&T are outstanding.

- Professional development of staff ensures that they have relevant knowledge of current industry practice and health and safety standards.
- The dynamic support and guidance of leaders and managers successfully ensure that improvements are continually made in all aspects of D&T.
- The strategic drive and planning at governor and senior leadership level, with incorporated links to the wider community, are exceptional. This is clearly evidenced by the development of a community skills centre, extensive collaboration with local primary schools, and the progressive actions to promote energy efficiency and renewable generation for the locality.

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 outstanding.

- Students and their families are highly supportive of the vision for D&T and the exciting developments that are underway for the college to be a showcase for all types of renewable energy and to be a centre of learning for the wider community.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing students' independence, particularly in Years 7 to 10, by ensuring that they have time for greater reflection and more opportunities to make their own choices in lessons.

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

Steffi Penny
Her Majesty's Inspector