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Mr A Raymer
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Raymer

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 9 and 10 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Students' achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- An improving trend in the quality of students' work and attainment is firmly reflected in the school's data. The attainment of Year 11 boys has increased significantly in the past year and more students are choosing to study D&T at Key Stage 4. GCSE D&T results in 2009 remained below the national average and some students are still not making the progress expected.

- Students' progress in lessons is satisfactory. Key Stage 3 students' work demonstrates they are developing an adequate understanding of materials and their working properties, but their designing skills are much weaker than making. Year 10 and 11 students are on track to achieve their targets. Students are responding well to intervention measures. Teachers are providing extensive support to help them to manage their projects as the skills that underpin this are not developed firmly enough in the Key Stage 3 curriculum.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is satisfactory and they understand the reasons for health and safety rules. However, some Year 11 students do not always apply them and have to be reminded to wear personal safety equipment in workshops. Younger students demonstrate more positive attitudes to learning and are quickly developing skills to prepare and cook healthy meals. Improvement to equipment and use of computer-aided design and manufacture are adding to students' enjoyment of D&T.

Quality of teaching of D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Teachers' subject knowledge and effective management of lessons and complex equipment are strengths of their work. Good practice was observed in both key stages. At Key Stage 4, teachers are better placed to use detailed assessment knowledge of each student and their stage of work to plan lessons that meet their needs. Students value this individual support and know the next steps to take in their work to reach their targets. In contrast, Year 9 students are unclear about how to improve to reach the next level.
- An adequate range of learning methods supports learning for individual students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, this is not consistent for all students and repetitive written tasks are not challenging them sufficiently nor promoting the active learning that they enjoy and should receive in D&T.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- A firmer emphasis on enrichment of the curriculum and the introduction of new modules of work have brought greater relevance and benefits to some students' learning and enjoyment. However, opportunities for all students to learn about sustainability and to know and understand about the impact of technological development on society are underdeveloped. Most students currently leave the school with few challenging experiences of applying their technological knowledge to solve real problems with real clients.
- Schemes of work are focused on what students will do, and, in places, are repetitive rather than developmental and challenging. Plans do not consistently show what students are expected to learn and, consequently, they are not as useful to teachers as they could be.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

Leadership and management in D&T are satisfactory.

- The new head of department has a firm awareness of the best provision and outcomes and this informs his direction of subject leadership. A sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision guides development plans, and policies, systems and common practices have been established quickly. A start has been made, more securely at Key Stage 4 than elsewhere, to use information and data strategically to identify students' underperformance. However, the curriculum is not monitored and evaluated sufficiently to ensure it consistently provides challenging, relevant experiences for all students.
- Senior leaders are ambitious to transform D&T and are providing conditions for the department to develop. They encourage and support creative and innovative approaches to learning.

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 most students see the relevance of D&T to life skills and design and technical jobs. Younger students see a wider relevance to learning and general preparation for work. The vision for D&T is shared across the department but has yet to be shared more widely.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring the curriculum is evaluated regularly so that it consistently provides challenge, is focused on what students will learn and provides greater depth to their learning about sustainability and the impact of design and technological innovation on society
- ensuring all students have opportunities to design and make in response to solving real problems and that they experience the challenge of working with clients.

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