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Mrs L Lyons  
Headteacher  
Gillingham School  
Hardings Lane  
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Dear Mrs Lyons

Ofsted 2010–11 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 15 and 16 September to look at work in 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is outstanding.

Achievement in D&T

Students' achievement in D&T is outstanding.

- Most students start Year 7 with skills and capabilities in D&T that are expected at their age. Students enjoy their D&T lessons and this is reflected in the very high take-up at GCSE. Standards in GCSE continue to be significantly above the national average, particularly in the highest grades. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are at risk of exclusion or disaffection achieve as well as their peers. This is a result of the rigorous support of expert staff and the way in which the curriculum is adapted to meet individual needs.
- In the sixth form excellent achievement is maintained. Standards are exemplary. For example, one student gained full marks for her coursework in making excellent use of polymorphic material to produce a model of exceptional quality.

## Quality of teaching of D&T

The quality of teaching is outstanding.

- The school accurately evaluates the quality of teaching in D&T. Up-to-date expert subject knowledge underpins the exceptional progress in lessons. The passion for D&T and staff commitment to support high-quality learning inspire students and encourage them to do their best. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary.
- Computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) are used very effectively to support learning. Computers are used extremely well to help improve standards and increase independent learning skills, particularly for those who have the weakest literacy skills.
- Assessment procedures are consistent across all aspects of D&T. Students' performance is monitored closely. Teachers use assessment information very effectively. Students know how well they are doing and how to increase their rate of progress.

## Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- The school's vision for D&T reflects the importance of preparing students for a technologically advanced society. In Key Stage 4, students have access to an increasing number of new and innovative materials alongside excellent resources for CAD/CAM. These enable them to trial and create products of professional quality through rapid prototype techniques. This underpins the outstanding work seen in GCSE and in the sixth form. The school is rightly reviewing the Key Stage 3 curriculum in order to extend the working knowledge for younger students.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

Leadership and management in D&T are outstanding.

- Leaders and managers at all levels work as a cohesive team. Departmental systems are coherent and applied with a high level of consistency. The right actions to secure sustained improvement in D&T have been clearly identified and followed through. The effectiveness of the actions taken is demonstrated by the continued improvements in students' achievement and the excellent inclusion practice. The department is at the cutting edge of using good-quality modern resources to enhance learning. The school is not complacent and continues to invest in machinery such as the new laser cutter for the textiles area to facilitate potential developments.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the Key Stage 3 curriculum provides greater opportunity for younger students to experience metal processes and technologically advanced materials.

I hope that 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 published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Steffi Penny  
Her Majesty's Inspector