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Mr N Hemming
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hemming

Ofsted 2011–12 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 Gina White HMI on 7 and 8 June 2011 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 good.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is good.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is significantly above the national average for D&T with 91.3% of students gaining A* to C grades at GCSE. Historically, more boys than girls have opted for this subject, but this is changing in response to the introduction of new courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Girls have achieved slightly higher than boys in the past to gain more A* and A grades at GCSE. In the lessons seen, all students made good progress. Effective monitoring and tracking of all students coupled with individual mentoring for each student ensure that prompt interventions are made to maintain students' progress. Vulnerable students, those known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after students and those for whom English is a second language are well

supported and make the same good progress as other groups. Key technical words are appropriately provided in students' first language.

- Key Stage 3 students learn basic skills well. By the end of the key stage, most have begun to develop their design capabilities but opportunities to extend them further are sometimes missed. Students work well in groups and pairs. They demonstrate good reasoning skills, plan carefully and evaluate their work iteratively to modify and develop their ideas. Students explained clearly how their knowledge of other designers' work has influenced them.
- Sixth-form students are highly motivated and set themselves challenging targets and tasks. Students are developing a secure understanding of commercial design practice.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is good.

- Teachers use their expert knowledge and industrial and commercial experiences effectively to establish a culture of high expectations for students. This has led to an exceptionally high quality of finish of all products made in the department. It has raised students' self-confidence who are justly proud of their achievements. Mutual respect between staff and students is well established.
- Lessons move at a brisk pace with slick routines which ensure that no time is wasted. Students' learning and progress are frequently checked and well promoted during lessons. For example, in a Year 8 textile lesson, green and red cards were held up by students to quickly establish how well they understood the work. This enabled the teacher to pinpoint and quickly tackle any misconceptions. Strategies such as 'hot desking' are used well to enable students to extend their thinking about their designs and to respect others' view points. Quick 'tick' and 'dot' evaluations of each others' work enabled speedy feedback to students to help them to improve their work.
- Teachers use their wealth of internet resources and information and communication technology well to support and extend teaching and learning. Every student is able to access a wide range of materials including mark schemes, previous work by students and past examination papers and exemplar materials. This encourages independent working.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and reflects students' interests. New courses, such as the national diploma in hospitality and catering at Key Stage 4, have broadened opportunities and increased student numbers. Such developments are beginning to challenge students' stereotypical choices. Sixth-form courses are increasingly popular and build effectively on earlier work.

- Opportunities are provided at Key Stage 3 for students to work with systems and control and to learn about electronics. However, the current rigid system of seven-week blocks in each material area limits students' opportunities to develop more complex design briefs. The order in which students study each material area requires further consideration in order to better promote progression in designing and making.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

The effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T is good.

- The head of department has a clear vision and is dedicated to developing the subject. He is ably supported by the second in department. Together they have worked hard to develop an effective and enthusiastic team of staff. As a result, there are high levels of cooperation and team work. Staff give huge amounts of their time and energy to developing students' capabilities beyond lesson times. Students clearly appreciated the help and support they received.
- Health and safety meet all statutory requirements and an appropriate emphasis is placed on up-to-date training. Appropriate risk assessments are carried out and students are informed and able to take responsibility for safe working practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensure that there is greater flexibility in Key Stage 3 coursework so that the order of projects promotes better progression for students and provide more challenge and complexity to improve their chances of gaining A* and A grades at GCSE.

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

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector