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Mr H Bellamy
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Bellamy

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 on 13 and 14 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of D&T is satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory

- Most students start Year 7 with skills and capabilities which are similar to those normally found. GCSE results across a three-year period highlight that attainment is broadly just above national benchmarks. Generally, students make satisfactory progress in lessons, though sometimes they thoroughly enjoy their learning and make outstanding achievement as seen in the high quality of work produced in food technology, catering and in some resistant materials work. Conversely, occasionally students do not make the progress they are capable of because the work is not planned well enough to meet their specific needs.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory

- Teachers' management of lessons is generally effective in securing students' interest and engagement with the activities that they are undertaking. Food and catering experiences strengthen students' understanding of healthy living, solving pertinent problems and these prepare them very successfully for life beyond school.
- Students' work is regularly marked and feedback is generally useful and informative so that they know where and how to improve. Although frequently given, some teachers do not exploit the potential of home learning and homework to secure understanding and to increase students' progress in Key Stage 3. However, the main assessments occur at the end of projects. This means that students have limited opportunities to aim for higher levels or grades during projects. Students of all ages do not have enough opportunities to accurately assess themselves against D&T National Curriculum level descriptors or GCSE grade criteria. This reduces their independence and resilience.
- Although satisfactory overall, there is insufficient attention in some teachers' planning and assessment to ensure that: work is based on enhancing students' prior learning; work is increasingly challenging to meet the needs of the most-able students; and that appropriate support is planned for, and given to, those students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. On these occasions, the explicit linking of lesson plans to the targets in students' statements of special educational needs and individual education plans to help students achieve them is poor.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

The quality of the curriculum in D&T is satisfactory

- Good practice in cross-curricular work helps to extend students' capabilities and understanding. Links with feeder primary schools and other departments are established well for example, through the extremely successful 'Tiger Poem' project. However, opportunities are missed to make closer links with science, engineering and mathematics to enhance students' understanding of technology. Schemes of work in Key Stage 3 do not always meet students' needs or prepare them for a modern technological society. Resistant materials and textile projects lack sufficient challenge to enable students to reach the higher National Curriculum levels. Opportunities for students to meet the needs of users, to work on real design challenges and to develop and demonstrate their creative thinking and problem-solving skills are thinly represented in the current Key Stage 3 scheme of work.
- Catering courses are stimulating and rewarding for students. The school is rightly reviewing the appropriateness, and levels, of other vocational courses it offers to ensure that students are sufficiently challenged.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

The effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T is satisfactory

- The in-depth, high-quality department review undertaken by the school in March 2011 has helped the school's leaders and governing body to have an accurate view of the significant strengths and the areas for development and improvement. The school has already started to implement some of the improvement needed. For example, the department's facilities and buildings are being developed to equal the excellent specialist catering facilities.
- Standardisation and moderation procedures are thorough. However, the monitoring, and improvement, of the impact of the adult support in lessons for those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities lacks rigour.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students know the level at which they are working so that they can increase their rate of progress and level of challenge for themselves
- improving the quality and consistency of lesson planning so that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities have all their targets effectively supported and monitored, and that the more able students are appropriately challenged
- reviewing the Key Stage 3 curriculum, particularly the textiles and resistant materials projects, to ensure that students make better progress and achievement by:
 - using home learning more effectively
 - helping students to think like designers by providing more opportunities for them to learn how to solve challenging and interesting 'real-life' problems.
 - ensuring students have a secure knowledge of current technological developments through first-hand experience of using technologically advanced materials and manufacturing processes in all D&T areas
- evaluating, and improving, the impact of the adult support provided for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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