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Mrs F Jack
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jack

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 14 and 15 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 inadequate.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is inadequate.

- Most students currently in Year 7 and even more in Year 8 are not making the progress expected of them given their attainment on entry to the school. They can follow instructions and assemble products designed by their teachers and in doing so they learn technical skills. Tasks constrain their attainment of higher grades because they provide too little opportunity to develop their designing and planning skills and to take decisions about their work.
- Some students choose not to continue with D&T at the end of Year 8 although increasing numbers of students, particularly boys, choose to undertake a full GCSE in D&T in one year in Year 9, 10 or 11. GCSE results in 2010 were significantly below average. Students, particularly girls and

those who are more able, did not achieve as well as the school expected. Moreover, the school's data show that the current examination groups are not making the progress expected to reach their targets. Few students gained AS qualifications in 2010 and achievement was low. Three students who continued to A level are making at least satisfactory progress and two are making good progress to meet their targets.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good technical knowledge; they manage lessons safely and draw upon these strengths in their lessons. In most lessons, learning objectives are overly focused on what students will do in the lesson rather than what they will learn in terms of understanding concepts or specific knowledge. Students said that teachers' use of other students' work helped to influence their own ideas.
- Where students made good progress, lessons were well structured so that they knew what was expected of them and they worked industriously to meet deadlines. In a revision lesson for GCSE electronics, students identified gaps in their own knowledge and used resources effectively to research what they needed to know. Guidance about what made a good presentation challenged them to consider how they would visually and verbally engage their audience. The cumulative impact of sharing their knowledge enhanced the learning for the whole class.
- Not all lessons were as effective, and because they were not as well matched to the learning needs of students, their progress and attainment varied from satisfactory to inadequate. Too much talking by teachers and questioning that was narrowly focused on finding right answers missed opportunities to find out what students knew and understood and where they needed more support or challenge. Students said that GCSE courses were less challenging than they expected them to be.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- The curriculum lacks breadth and depth and this compromises students' learning. Three features have led to this: the organisation of the curriculum to study a GCSE in one year after a two-year Key Stage 3 course; the lack of formalised schemes of work; and the practice in the department of teachers working independently to decide what students will study in lessons. Together, these factors result in duplication and gaps in students' technical making skills, limited designing strategies with too little emphasis on meeting users' needs or contexts for students to apply their learning. Consequently, this does not sufficiently develop students designing and making capability or reflect a modern curriculum with high expectations of all students.

- Good practice in planning to link together specific learning objectives, relevant activities and assessments was noted in a Year 7 food technology module.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- The day-to-day management of the department runs smoothly. Health and safety policies are implemented and safe practice is followed by staff and students. Monitoring and evaluation are at a very early stage of development. They reflect a determination by the school to improve students' progress. However, a lack of cohesion and awareness of what students study in the curriculum hinders the development of D&T and solutions to improving students' progress.
- Senior leaders know the strengths in teaching and where good practice is found. Equally, they know where improvements are required. The school's decision to end the vertical curriculum and structural changes to enable students to stay longer in Key Stage 3 to develop their knowledge before taking GCSEs are well founded.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that schemes of work are in place and that they reflect a modern curriculum, high expectations of students and clearly show what students are expected to know, understand and can do
- ensuring lessons are consistently matched to students' learning needs to secure better progress and attainment
- improving the rigour of departmental monitoring and evaluation practices and ensuring that they inform sharply focused action plans to secure improvement.

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

Gina White
Her Majesty's Inspector