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Mr N Swann
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Dear Mr Swann

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology and
Citizenship

Thank you on behalf of Scott Harrison HMI and myself for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during our visit on 03-04 June to look at work in Design and Technology (D&T) and Citizenship.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

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

Design and Technology

The overall effectiveness of D&T was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are broadly average by the end of Year 11.

- Students enter the school in Year 9 many with limited prior experiences in D&T and standards below that expected for their age. From this starting point, students extend their knowledge in using a range of materials safely and they make good progress in a short period of time to reach the levels expected for their age. Most students use this set of

common experiences to make informed choices about the specialist D&T exam course they will pursue in Years 10 and 11. However, fewer students continue their studies in D&T compared to that commonly found in specialist technology colleges.

- Attainment in GCSE D&T examinations is broadly in line with the average, but boys do not achieve as well as girls. In 2007 boys did not do as well in D&T as they did in other subjects. Action to tackle this issue through the use of electronic portfolios is helping boys to manage and organise their coursework and to record the development of the products they make more securely.
- Students studying Advanced level courses achieve highly. The quality and precision of making, particularly in textiles, is outstanding.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall but variable.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. Staff preparation and use of resources is outstanding; technicians contribute positively to promoting students' confidence and accurate use of tools and equipment.
- Lessons have a clear purpose and in the best of them students are active and engaged from the start. The pace of learning is lively and tasks are generally well pitched to meet the interests and needs of students. However not all lessons are like this; in some the pace of learning is slow at times and activities are not tailored sufficiently to challenge and engage all students.
- Students find project booklets helpful in guiding their learning in the specialist projects in Year 9. Writing frames are used well to support students in writing specifications and in evaluating how well their products work. Students enjoy the challenge of solving problems in D&T and in creating original responses and ideas. However some students are frustrated by design and make activities where insufficient consideration is given to explaining the constraints on designing and making before they begin work.
- The teaching of essential project management skills and particularly the planning skills required for students to manage their time independently are at an early stage. This currently constrains students' ability to work more independently at Key Stage 4.
- Assessment and students' knowledge of how to improve their work is satisfactory in Year 9 and good in the specialist courses at Key Stage 4 and post 16. Older students are well supported in their revision programmes. Vulnerable students feel well supported; they receive good and detailed advice, much of it verbally, and act upon it to modify and improve the quality of coursework. They are developing into confident learners.

Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum meets requirements and is regularly reviewed and updated to better meet students' needs; for example, the use of client based projects in product design and engineering has motivated students, particularly boys, and provided rigour and challenge to coursework.
- Excellent opportunities are provided for small groups of students to develop knowledge and skills in making and racing electric powered racing cars. This makes a significant contribution in developing students' persistence in completing tasks, knowledge of engineering, skills of precision manufacture and the value of teamwork.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject at all levels are good.

- Senior leaders provide effective support for the subject; they ensure the subject is well resourced and have maintained staffing levels and secured good leadership of the subject in the face of local recruitment difficulties.
- Self-evaluation is thorough and has been used well to identify key strengths and weaknesses in the subject and to develop short term plans to tackle the most pressing needs towards raising attainment and tackling the underperformance of boys.
- Health and safety are secured, technician support is excellent and staff expertise is well deployed.

The extent to which the D&T department is prepared for the Key Stage 3 and 14-19 curriculum changes

- Planning to develop the D&T curriculum and extend choice of Level 2 and 3 courses through the introduction of vocational courses is well advanced.
- The time currently available for the teaching of food in Year 9 falls short of the minimum entitlement required for statutory cooking lessons. The school is at an early stage in planning arrangements with its feeder middle schools to secure all students' entitlement to cook.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring students progressively acquire strategies to support them in planning and managing projects to enable them to become independent learners

- ensuring high pace and challenge is a consistent feature in lessons to further improve the quality of teaching and learning and the progress students make.

Citizenship

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be satisfactory with some good and emerging features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Students demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of aspects of citizenship with some areas of greater strength, such as the law and human rights, global issues and topical citizenship issues.
- Students' books contain some substantial written work on citizenship including a few examples of creative individual work on aspects of campaigning. More generally, however, work on citizenship lacks depth.
- Although students in Year 9 were able to discuss the work of government and voting, this was not built upon by students in Key Stage 4, suggesting lack of progression over the course as a whole.
- Some students demonstrate very high standards in enquiry and communication and participation and responsible action because of their involvement in particular activities such as the 'Take Action' group and college councils.
- In group work, some students, particularly boys, occupied themselves with undemanding activities when the chance was offered.

Quality of teaching and learning of citizenship

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.

- Students interviewed enjoy citizenship and would like to take the issues they discuss to greater depth.
- The lessons observed were either satisfactory or good and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. Good features of lessons included the well planned use of resources including information communication technology (ICT), interesting and varied tasks and good relationships with students. A lesson on human rights, for example, elicited good responses from students and engaged them through a presentation by a member of staff who had been with the UN peacekeeping force in Bosnia.
- However, in attempting to cover too much in order to meet the requirements for both citizenship and RE, a weakness of some lessons was that citizenship issues were not taken to their conclusion. Some tasks were therefore unchallenging, for example with students being

asked to campaign on an issue such as 'anti-war' without a real context to enable them to choose and defend their own position.

- Good examples were seen of planning to ensure that group work is inclusive. ICT was used to support some lower attaining students and was used for by one student not yet confident in speaking English.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The core citizenship programme lies within 'enrichment studies', predominantly a course preparing students for an RE GCSE. Although this means that much of the citizenship National Curriculum is covered in range, the treatment of topics in greater depth generally takes place in the context of RE objectives.
- The overview scheme of work provides good, broad aims for citizenship and includes an assessment policy. In the detailed planning, there is greater strength in Year 9 and Year 11 than Year 10, where most units are solely concerned with RE or PSHE. Some important topics are treated in only a single lesson.
- Significant contributions are made to citizenship by other subjects, particularly geography, and in other aspects of the school's work.
- Extra curricular activities, particularly arising from the link to a school in Uganda and the marketing of fair trade tea, provide the students involved with rich opportunities to learn about and participate in citizenship issues and activities.
- The House and Year Councils and the College Council provide students with opportunities to take on representative roles and to be agents for change in the school. As yet the systems for involvement in these activities are uneven and more needs to be done to communicate with the whole student body.

Leadership and management of citizenship

The leadership and management of citizenship are good.

- The school has taken citizenship very seriously. The school has developed good aims for citizenship both in the curriculum and for the school as a whole.
- The decision to try to embed citizenship within GCSE RE has already been questioned, in no small part as a result of taking into account students' views within a thorough self-evaluation.
- As well as providing curriculum time for citizenship, the school made the decision to appoint two specialist teachers. The school has maintained good external links to ensure that thinking about citizenship is up to date. This has enabled the school to pilot work on assessment and to think about the implications of revisions to the National Curriculum.

Subject issue: teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

- A unit of the enrichment studies course introduces students to the diversity of the United Kingdom. The discussion of issues such as racism and conflict resolution has also contributed to this aspect.
- Even so, students say that they still lack confidence in talking about diversity and would appreciate further opportunities to broaden their understanding of and links with different communities of the UK.
- The school's plan to link with a school in Leicester may provide a good opportunity to meet this need.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to consider how citizenship might be provided for in the curriculum to enable more work in depth across a range of citizenship topics
- to plan series of lessons to give students the knowledge they need to make change action more meaningful
- to ensure that all students are challenged appropriately.

We hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T and citizenship in the school.

As explained in the previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gina White HMI
Subject Adviser, D&T