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Mr Hepburn
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Dear Mr Hepburn

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Design and Technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 20-21 January to look at work in Design and Technology (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. 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.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards overall are satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with below average attainment and by the end of Key Stage 4 students reach below average standards. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment is significantly wide.
- Most students achieve as expected and their performance is not significantly different to their achievement in other subjects. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress, and some make good progress from their starting points; they do well in catering but reach lower levels in graphics and resistant materials courses.
- Students enjoy D&T and the proportions that choose to continue to study the subject at Key Stage 4 and who chose to study Advanced level textiles are increasing from a low base. Recent low attainment in textiles has been

linked to a lack of prior experience at GCSE level and the school has acted swiftly to change the entry requirements for the Advanced level course.

- Students' personal development is satisfactory. They enjoy D&T and this is demonstrated in a steadily increasing take-up. Students behave well in lessons and want to be successful. All students are confident they can cook and look after themselves. Opportunities to develop independence are constrained in some aspects of the subject at Key Stage 3 and students have few opportunities to exercise decision making.

Quality of teaching and learning of D&T

The quality of teaching and learning overall is satisfactory.

- Teachers' subject knowledge and class management are good. Teaching about health and safety is effective and students understand and apply safe practices in lessons.
- Technicians and support staff make an effective contribution in lessons to encourage and support students. Their assistance in helping students to prepare and organise their time when cooking is appreciated.
- In the best lessons students are encouraged to modify and develop their ideas and acquire high levels of technical skill. Students use a wide range of research skills in textiles and in a few courses they develop original and innovative products. However, the good practice underlying such lessons is not shared across the department. In many lessons at Key Stage 3 learning is insufficiently adapted to students' needs, particularly for more able learners, and opportunities are missed to encourage creativity and to support students in developing independent learning skills.

Quality of the D&T curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16 meet students' needs and interests.
- Awareness of designers is well embedded in textiles courses and provides useful stimulation of ideas for students taking Advanced level courses. However this is not the case for all other students and opportunities to work with designers and makers are too limited at Key Stage 3.
- The Key Stage 3 schemes of work meet national requirements overall but few opportunities are provided for students to progressively develop knowledge and skills in using computer aided design and to experience and understand computer aided manufacture. Consequently the pace of making is slow, particularly when pupils use resistant materials. This limits opportunities for students to experience current manufacturing methods and to refine and develop their abilities to solve complex technical problems, to test their products and to make changes to develop their work.
- Students see D&T as relevant and useful in developing life skills and for making career decisions. The knowledge and skills students acquire through the study of food technology contributes well to developing enterprise skills and promoting their health and well-being.

Leadership and management of D&T

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

- Your support for D&T has ensured the subject is well led and sufficiently staffed. A plan is in place to tackle the longstanding issue of a lack of computer aided design and manufacture.
- The subject leader is enthusiastic: she leads by example and is highly focussed on meeting students' needs and raising standards.
- Management of the subject draws effectively upon school systems and processes and particularly self evaluation. Strengths and weaknesses are known and are reflected in D&T improvement plans. The school has a clear view of what steps to take to move D&T forward.
- Continuing professional development is used well to support staff knowledge and understanding of Key Stage 4 courses and health and safety requirements. Students benefit in receiving clear advice and guidance: they work safely and learn new techniques.

The extent to which inequality and stereotyping are tackled in D&T:

- The school has identified low prior attainment in English, mathematics and science as a factor contributing to the wide gap between boys' and girls' attainment in D&T.
- The school tackles stereotypical subject choice. Boys are increasingly choosing to continue to study food technology in Year 10 because the course is practical and engaging and appeals to their interests in cooking as a life skill and as a possible career in catering.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included raising standards by:

- improving teaching and learning to ensure staff expectations of quality and students experiences of it are consistent across all aspects of D&T
- making sure all students develop independent learning skills and that they have frequent opportunities to apply them during lessons
- ensuring teaching is better matched to students needs at Key Stage 3 and ensure all are challenged and make progress.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop D&T 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