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Mr M Schofield
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Dear Mr Schofield

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 28 and 29 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in D&T

Achievement in D&T is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment and progress in developing D&T capability vary at Key Stages 3 and 4 and between boys and girls. The roots of this are connected to weaknesses in students' breadth of understanding in the different parts of D&T and in the gendered choices that students make at the end of Key Stage 3.
- Girls attain higher grades than boys in examinations, and particularly so at A* to C grades. This trend is established in results over the last three years. Students who undertake textiles and food-related courses, such as catering and hospitality, make better progress to achieve their targets compared with those who study resistant materials and engineering.

- Currently, students' work and progress at Key Stage 4 are improving compared with 2010 and are good. The school has taken action to better prepare students to manage examinations. Teachers are quick to identify students who need extra support or who are falling behind in their work. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in lessons and develop confidence as learners in response to support and specialist programmes provided in food and textiles.
- Students' attitudes to learning are generally positive: most students want to do their best and are proud of their work. They achieve well when they have opportunities to develop and use their own ideas to make functional products that meet the needs of different users, and where they are able to, they extend the complexity of their making and planning skills. However, for some students, and particularly boys, the opportunities to develop their independence and learning in this way are constrained and are not sufficiently challenging.

Quality of teaching in D&T

The quality of teaching in D&T is satisfactory.

- Teachers' specialist knowledge of traditional materials and techniques is thorough. 'Floating' teachers are used well in all lessons to support learning by providing individual advice: for example, in a Year 10 graphics lesson, students were well supported to make a personal response to the brief. In the best lessons, learning outcomes are well defined and teaching is pitched effectively to students' needs. Questioning skills were used effectively by some teachers to identify what students knew and understood and they used this to help them to increase the level of challenge and pace of learning. However, this best practice is not applied consistently in lessons, particularly where learning objectives are too generalised to inform meaningful assessment of students' abilities. For example, in tasks where challenge is limited to following instructions to make the same product, designed by the teacher, and using the same materials and processes.
- Assessment and feedback are stronger in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than in Key Stage 3, where moderation is developing. Students said that teachers' use of other students' work helps them to understand the different levels and grades and what is expected of them.

Quality of the curriculum in D&T

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

- Provision at Key Stage 4 provides good pathways to vocational courses, particularly in catering and hospitality, and is well informed by local needs and students' interests. Courses to meet the specialist needs of some student groups such as those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and who have additional learning needs are well developed in food and textiles. The practical application of theory is well integrated in some courses.

- The school is taking action to tackle the gaps in the Key Stage 3 curriculum to enable students to learn about systems and control and to modernise the activities taking place in resistant materials and electronics projects. Insufficient collaboration takes place in planning the curriculum so that it securely builds on what students learn and consistently develops their skills, knowledge and concepts in D&T. This leads to satisfactory rather than good progress.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in D&T

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

- The new subject leader is moving forward in developing a vision for modernising D&T and is effectively building the support of the team. Provision is regularly reviewed and has led to developments in curriculum provision: this is more secure at Key Stage 4 and attention is turning to Key Stage 3.
- Senior leadership's support and challenge have led to good facilities and resources, particularly for food. The school acts promptly to ensure students' safety in D&T and good attention is given in lessons and is supported by training.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- planning the Key Stage 3 learning programme collaboratively as a team to ensure that skills, knowledge and concepts are built on consistently to promote students' good progress
- ensuring the different parts of D&T are up to the standard of the highest and that the gaps in boys' achievement are eliminated
- applying best practice to sharply define the outcomes consistently in lessons to support assessment and good learning.

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