In Conversation with Brian Oppenheim - Lead HMI for D&T for Ofsted 2021 – key points

1. Design and technology where it's working well, motivates pupils, they love it, you talk to them about which are their favourite subjects, engagement has never been an issue never, generally design technology is a subject they like they like it because it's something different from sitting at a desk, they like the practical side of it.
2. Engagement doesn't mean that the quality is there, you can keep kids busy and happy without it. If you're not experienced in what design technology is all about it's very easy to look at it and say but this must be good because all these pupils are engaged, they're all enjoying it and having fun. They've produced all these interesting little objects, but that doesn't mean to say that it's good or it doesn't mean it's valuable no it might have kept them busy so what are the good bits?
3. You've got to show them why they're learning what they're learning and how that links to the real world.
4. There's something there about design technology that provides pupils with success where perhaps they're not achieving success elsewhere that will allow them to get on with other subjects as well, that's the knock-on effect I think, it's just powerful and switches the light on.
5. Primary – Initial Teacher Education provides as little as 6 hours DT training. There's a lack of subject knowledge and an overreliance on published materials. Is there enough CPD for teachers and can they afford that CPD? You're going to get literacy and numeracy training at primary level but you're not going to get anything in design and technology.
6. I believe that we can teach character through our subjects, spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development, things like teamwork, things like tenacity and being able to pursue something even though it's not going right and come back to it and carry on. I've got a big thing about failure that I think schools at the moment are almost risk adverse, failing is part of the process, it isn't failing actually it's learning.
7. The whole point of looking at the curriculum and its breadth and its depth is about saying that there is more to learning a subject than just learning the facts, that's always been the problem for design technology; being able to distinguish between what's the knowledge and what are the skills that we want to learn, in order to perform a skill, you need the knowledge.
8. What makes a good curriculum is ambition for the pupils and making sure that the curriculum is structured in a way that builds progression and that the sequence of tasks builds that progression. It's that sequencing and structure and ambition that are the keys for a successful curriculum and that's what ofsted will be looking for, the key is making sure that there is a coherent plan from the beginning to the end.
9. Where design technology has failed, it has been in terms of the quality of education that it's been providing. It's the lack of progression, rather than repeating things where they'll do something in one material, and they'll do something in another material but actually the skills and the knowledge are not dissimilar and all they're really doing is repeating the same things. If you're not careful you can repeat it with a different end product exactly and it's the end product becomes the important bit rather than what you're putting into it.

10. Employers say one of the reasons that they find design technology students better to employ is that they don't just follow instructions, they try things out they use their initiative, they've got resilience so when it goes wrong, they can come back again and try a different way. We have to challenge the misconception that if you're practical, you're not quite as clever as somebody else.

11. The cognitive psychology theory talks about connections in the brain, you end up with this schema in your brain of all this knowledge connected up so you might not, in design technology, know everything that you need to know but what you remember about other things helps you to go off and look for new knowledge in the right place and look in the right places and understand that new piece of knowledge because you've already got the previous piece. There's something about design and technology attitudes that are about not always having the answer but having to find the answer, about having to say let's go back and look at what we do know and can we build on that. I think one of the beauties of our subject, kids are learning to solve problems and that doesn't necessarily have to be a design problem it could be a life problem, but the same skill sets apply to it and who isn't going to meet problems in their life.

12. The curriculum should be allowing pupils to remember more so that they can learn more. It's this idea that as you build up your knowledge over time you make connections across the knowledge so that it becomes much more meaningful than just a set of knowledge in a box. Knowledge is not a kind of a package, here's a bit and here's a bit and so on actually it's all joined up and it's making those connections for pupils that becomes the strong curriculum and helping students to see how something they've learned in geography applies to something they're doing in dt applies to something they're doing, and so on… and the whole lot then makes sense. You can join the whole thing together without it being contrived and that yes, it's always. Do these pupils remember this information? Do they remember this so that when they go to another subject, they can recall it? It's that bit about recalling it and it being in long-term memory. It's the long-term memory and that requires some repetition, it requires going back over some of those things later on in the course without repeating necessarily exactly the same thing but nevertheless repeating the concepts.

13. Deep dives: What we're doing is trying to look at each subject and identify what the barriers may be to a good curriculum, a very well structured and sequenced curriculum, a broad and deep and meaningful experience for pupils. The idea is that day one of the inspection you will do the deep dives, but the team would have some sort of hypothesis. There seems to be an awful lot more conversations with student groups than there were under the old framework: what is your learning like in this subject? What are the areas that you're struggling with? Etc… So, the first component of a deep dive is talking to the subject leaders, although you could say the very first component is that it's a high-level discussion with head teachers over the phone, but on the inspection one of the first component really is talking to the subject leads about rationale and curriculum planning and so on. There is also looking at lessons so the questions might well be what are you doing in your curriculum? And a leader says well this is what we're doing. Your next part of that process would be okay now show me where that's happening in the classroom, does it match the intention? It's only a snapshot so that initial conversation with the head teacher on the phone really important because you're having a high-level conversation with senior leaders trying to get a view about where the curriculum is strongest and where there may be areas for improvement so that when the team come into the school first thing in the morning, they're not starting from a position of we don't know anything. It's hitting the ground running. That conversation really steers your beginning of your first day. The very first thing that you do once you've got into a school is to talk to subject leaders and not to senior leaders which is what we would have done in the past because I've had that conversation.