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Mr C Seward
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Seward

Ofsted 2011–12 survey inspection programme: information and communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 16 and 17 May 2011 to look at work in ICT.

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 eight lessons, including two observed jointly with you.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is outstanding.

- By the end of Year 9, students are achieving significantly above national averages and, by the end of Year 11, virtually all studying Diploma in Digital Applications or GCSE achieve grades A* to C. In 2010, Year 11 students not studying for an external qualification achieved Level 2 on the school's own, internal, assessment system. A significant number go on to study GCE 'A' level and results here are high with well above average numbers achieving grades A* to B. Many go on to study the subject in Higher Education. Across the school, students make at least good progress.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported to achieve well.

- Students are taught how to become safe and responsible users of new technologies through assemblies, their personal development programme and a substantial focus in ICT lessons. The impact of this teaching on the students' understanding of e-safety is good.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is outstanding. They listen to each other and work well together when given the opportunity, showing enjoyment in what they are doing. They often spontaneously celebrate the success of their peers, for example by applauding students who achieve particularly well. The relationships between staff and students when using ICT are excellent.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- Teaching has many good features. Most teaching focuses well on developing students' understanding and not just their ICT skills. Planning is detailed, often done collaboratively, though lessons sometimes contain too many short sections that do not provide opportunities for students to collaborate or enough time to think in depth; this can slow progress. Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of the course specifications and grade criteria are very good and this means they answer students' questions accurately. Teaching is clearly focused on helping students to achieve high grades. Differentiation by extending the task during one-to-one work is excellent. Teachers, who use ICT to enhance the teaching of their subject, for example in music, science and modern foreign languages, do so well, often using imaginative presentations to engage the students.
- Although ICT teaching supports students in developing their independent learning skills, opportunities are sometimes missed for group or paired work and, in these lessons, learning can become too teacher focused.
- The assessment of ICT work is very good. Assessment for learning is done well during lessons and the focus on target-setting and monitoring underachievement is a key factor in students achieving high standards. They are set, and achieve, challenging targets.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

- In Key Stage 3, the taught curriculum is very good because it is very up to date, relevant and challenging. The Key Stage 4 courses are well suited to the students at Davenant School and thus they achieve well. The department is not complacent and is seeking to enhance its curriculum by the introduction of computing courses in both Key Stages 4 and 5. Currently, some students in Year 10 have not opted for an ICT examined course. They are not formally taught or assessed in the subject and the school is not yet in a position to determine the progress of this group.

- The use of ICT by teachers of other subjects and the opportunities for students to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding are very variable across and within subjects. For example, in modern languages, aspects of science and RE, students and teachers often use ICT; in some other subjects this is not the case. Data have been collected about the use of ICT in other subjects, but this is at an early stage of development. There is no up-to-date audit of staffs' ICT subject knowledge. Where used well, however, the virtual learning environment (VLE) is beginning to have an impact on students' achievements.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- ICT is particularly well led at subject level. Succession planning by senior managers is also very good and shows a clear desire to maintain high standards and improve the quality of teaching and learning. The monitoring of the work of the department is regular, accurate and leads to improvements; there has been much improvement in the last three years. Self-evaluation is comprehensive, based on a range of evidence including student perceptions, and is accurate. The improvement plan is good. For example, the school has rightly placed an emphasis on implementing a new VLE and has made this an objective for all teachers in their annual performance review. The outcomes from this, however, are variable.
- Investments in infrastructure have been progressive and good; a suitable, sustainable strategic plan is in place.
- Overall, management and leadership show good capacity to improve even further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- bringing a more consistent approach to ICT across the school by
 - sharing students' achievements at key points in the year with all staff so that they can create opportunities for students to apply their ICT knowledge, skills and understanding
 - auditing and developing all teachers' ICT knowledge, skills and understanding in order to implement a professional development programme that would bring consistency to the use of ICT across and within subjects
 - further developing teachers' confidence and competence in using the VLE more creatively in order to bring all users to the standard of the best in the school.
- monitoring and assessing those not studying an ICT national examination in Year 10 in order to inform future curriculum provision in Key Stage 4.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop ICT 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

John Williams
Additional Inspector