24 June 2011

Mrs J Deery
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Deery

Ofsted $2011-12$ subject 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 13 and 14 June 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 seven lessons, including three observed jointly with you or a member of the senior staff.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is satisfactory.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is satisfactory.

■ By the end of Years 9 and 11, students are achieving in line with national averages. Results at the end of Key Stage 3 show a gradual improvement over the last three years. Virtually all students go on to study at post-16; approximately 10% of them follow an ICT-related course. Across the school, students make satisfactory progress.

■ Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well. This is because they receive good support in lessons from learning support assistants. A number also benefit from courses, such as 'Vision to Learn', work experience and apprenticeships that have a significant ICT content.

■ Students are taught how to become safe and responsible users of new technologies through assemblies and their personal development (PSHE)

programme. The impact of this teaching on the students' understanding of e-safety is satisfactory.

■ Students' behaviour in ICT lessons is satisfactory and good in other subject lessons where ICT is being used. In the latter, students work well together, showing much enjoyment in the set tasks. The relationships between staff and students when using ICT are good.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is satisfactory.

■ Teaching of ICT features careful planning that is clearly linked to the scheme of work in Key Stage 3 or the examination criteria in Key Stage 4. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the examinations and the software in school are good and they always answer students' technical questions accurately and with confidence. Their subject knowledge to teach ICT is satisfactory; opportunities to develop students' understanding of key ICT concepts or broaden their literacy skills are often missed. Although some ICT teaching supports students in developing their independent learning skills, opportunities are missed for group or paired work and, in these lessons, learning can become too teacher-focused.

■ When ICT is used to teach other subjects, it is often done extremely well. Teachers of mathematics, history and modern foreign languages, for example, often use imaginative presentations to engage the students. The use of mobile technology such as laptops and 'Ipods' is excellent. Here, teachers' knowledge and understanding of the technology are very good and this means that lessons are well balanced with presentation, use of video and interactive student participation.

■ The assessment of ICT work is satisfactory. Assessment for learning is done well during lessons and the department sets targets and monitors underachievement.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

■ The ICT taught curriculum is satisfactory in both key stages although the Year 7 course does not build sufficiently on Key stage 2. The course fpr students in Years 8 and 9 is supplemented by one lesson each week of a school-designed media studies course. This provides students with the opportunity to achieve at the ICT higher levels through, for example, multimedia and web design, but is an inefficient use of curriculum time. In addition, students do not receive any significant teaching about e-safety in ICT lessons, which results in their understanding being only satisfactory. The Key Stage 4 courses appear suited to most of the students. However, timetabling puts some 'core' and 'option' students in the same class, which results in them not receiving enough support or challenge.

■ The use of ICT by teachers of other subjects and the opportunities that students have to apply their ICT knowledge, skills and understanding are

variable across and within subjects. There is currently an excellent action-based research project in history that has had a significant impact on standards in both ICT and history and which is being extended to other subjects. This is the successful beginning of an unusual but effective plan to increase the use of ICT across the school.

■ Where used well, for example in setting homework in history, the virtual learning environment is having an impact on students' achievements.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

Leadership and management in ICT are satisfactory.

■ The subject leadership of ICT is satisfactory; the strategic leadership of ICT across the school is much better. ICT is a small department with teachers who try to provide their best for the students. However, teaching, learning and progress are only satisfactory. The department's self-review is inaccurate in some areas, for example it overestimates the attainment of the students. Some key points for development which would improve teaching and learning have not been actioned.

■ Senior managers demonstrate a clear desire to improve standards and the quality of teaching and learning. The use of ICT to set and monitor pupils' targets across the school is very good. The work of the ICT department is monitored regularly, accurate and leads to improvements; there has been an increase in the Key Stage 3 scores over the last three years and in the use of ICT across the school. Investments in ICT infrastructure and mobile technology have been progressive and good; there has been a strategic plan that has impacted well. Crucially, this plan is understood and supported by all staff.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed include:

■ improving, the quality of teaching and learning by:

  – focusing teaching on developing students' understanding of key ICT concepts

  – taking every opportunity to develop students' literacy skills

  – placing the focus of lessons more on students' learning rather than the teacher imparting knowledge and skills

■ improving the quality of the curriculum by:

  – reviewing timetabling arrangements in Key Stage 4

  – providing more challenge in Year 7 and reviewing the relationship between media studies and ICT in Years 8 and 9

■ improving the management and leadership of the subject by:

  – acting on the points for improvement raised in the self-review document.

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