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13 June 2011

Mrs N J Edmondson
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Dear Mrs Edmondson

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 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 seven lessons including two observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is satisfactory.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is good.

■ Students enter the school with levels of attainment in ICT which are broadly in line with national averages. By the end of Key Stage 3, the majority of students achieve a GCSE-equivalent qualification and reach levels of attainment which are well above the national average. This is very good progress. In Key Stage 4, students can opt to study a vocational ICT course. Students following this course make satisfactory but improving progress. In the sixth form, students make good progress in ICT. Overall achievement in ICT is good.

- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. They are supported well in lessons and by teaching assistants at other times.

- In the best lessons students behave well. They listen to each other and work well either in groups or independently. In all lessons seen, when using new technologies, they respected each other, the staff and the equipment.

- Students are supported to learn how to become safe and responsible users of new technologies through the ICT curriculum and through tutor time and assemblies.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is satisfactory.

- All teachers of ICT and those who use ICT in their teaching have good subject knowledge and are confident users of ICT. In the majority of lessons, teachers plan work which engages and motivates students. However, in some, all were asked to do the same tasks. The lack of differentiation and pace can lead to poor behaviour from some students.

- Students are confident and positive about using new technologies. They are encouraged by teachers to develop independent learning skills through paired and group working.

- The use of ICT to support learning across the school is satisfactory and improving. Students have good access to ICT and it is used appropriately in many lessons to develop their learning.

- The assessment of work in ICT lessons is good at Key Stages 3 and 4; most students are aware of their progress and know what they need to do to improve their work. However, in other curriculum areas, progress in ICT is not monitored.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

- All students at Key Stage 3 receive their entitlement to the statutory ICT National Curriculum during ICT lessons. This curriculum is reviewed regularly and has been recently updated to increase the challenge for students.

- The curriculum provided at Key Stage 4 for students who opt to study ICT is appropriate for most students. However, the school recognises that this does not challenge the most able students and is investigating introducing more appropriate accreditation for these students.

- Students have access to some high-quality opportunities to use ICT in other subjects. In one Year 7 music lesson, excellent resources were used to support students in composing dissonant music. However, this work is not effectively monitored or assessed, and this means that some students are receiving better experiences in ICT than others.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- Senior leaders and managers have a good overview of the strengths and weaknesses and plans to develop the department are in place. They are well-informed of current developments in the subject. ICT has a prominent and increasing profile in the school.

- There is a rigorous system of self-review which leads into a well-considered ICT development plan which is driving improvements in outcomes for students.

- Access to equipment in the school is good. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is used well by some departments and by students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

- The use of data to raise standards and improve provision is excellent. This is having a significant impact on students' achievement which has improved over the last three years and has led to improvements in the curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of students' learning and their progress in ICT throughout the school by providing all students with activities and tasks that are suitably matched to their abilities and interests, and by sharing best practice, in particular in using assessment information to enable differentiated activities in lessons

- developing the ICT curriculum at Key Stage 4 to better challenge and enthuse students

- ensuring that the use of ICT in other subjects is monitored and its impact known.

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

David Brown
Additional Inspector