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29 November 2011

Mr G Renwick
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Renwick

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 17 and 18 November 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 six lessons, including two which were observed jointly with you and the ICT coordinator.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good and improving.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is good.

- GCSE results are good; around 85% of the Year 11 cohort in 2011 were entered for the examination. All achieved at least the equivalent of one GCSE and a significant proportion achieved three GCSEs. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are also above average, particularly at level 6, though there are few students reaching level 7. GCE A-level grades are satisfactory but, as in Key Stage 3, few attain the higher grades.
- Progress overall is good; it is very good when students are studying the multimedia aspects of ICT. This is because they have many opportunities to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding in other subjects. Their progress is less good in programming and control technology. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well because

they receive effective support from both teaching assistants and their peers. The impact of teaching on the students' understanding of e-safety is excellent. They are taught how to become safe and responsible users of new technologies through modules in the ICT curriculum, in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) lessons, and with input from the community police officer.

- Students' response to each other and to teachers is outstanding. Their behaviour is excellent. Students work together with maturity, listening to each other and supporting each other to do well. They are creative and independent learners.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- In ICT subject-specific lessons, teachers always make clear the learning objectives to the students at the beginning of the lesson so that there is an understood expectation of what it is that students have to achieve within the hour. Relationships are excellent which means that teachers use 'breakout areas' and a range of resources very well to support learning. Teachers model the high values and attitudes that they expect from students and in turn the students respond well, showing enjoyment in what they are doing. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and this allows them to pose questions and answer students' questions accurately and with confidence, although on occasions questioning is too closed and does not provide for student independence.
- Teachers across the school use interactive whiteboards confidently and students have many opportunities to apply their ICT knowledge skills and understanding, though this does vary both across and within subjects. Teaching using ICT to teach other subjects is good and sometimes outstanding. Some practice, for example in modern languages using French websites for research to develop language skills, is exemplary. Here, as in some other subjects, the 'learning gateway' virtual learning environment is beginning to impact very well on students' achievement. A wide range of mobile technologies is used very well.
- The assessment of work in ICT-specific lessons is good and assessment for learning is done well during lessons. However, the assessment of ICT in other subjects is not used to inform the overall ICT assessment of the students.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

- The curriculum in ICT is good because it enables students to achieve well at GCSE. However, it is sometimes interpreted in a way that does not fully provide for creativity and independence. It is currently being re-designed to provide more challenge, especially for the most able, and to provide a better option for those who wish study computing or ICT at post-16. The Key Stage 3 course is also systematically being modified to make full use

of the wide range of high-quality technology available to students. At present, some of the modules in Year 7 do not fully build on students' prior learning from primary school.

- The ICT curriculum across the school has blossomed in the last 12 months in this new and highly effective building. The 'learning gateway' is impressive and is being used increasingly well by teachers to help students manage their work and bridge the home-school divide. Homework and resources for learning are being made increasingly available to students on this system so that they can meet the aim of the school to provide 'any time, anywhere' learning. The school is aware that it is now in the position of being able to make a start on coordinating ICT across the school to ensure that students have the necessary skills and understanding at key points that will allow them to use the technology well.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- The management and leadership of ICT are good. The strategic management across the school is very good. The school moved to a brand new building in September 2010 which has been expertly designed to provide opportunities for staff and students to use a vast range of new technologies in a potentially exciting and creative way. Senior managers are accurate in their evaluation of the current state of ICT teaching in the school and the whole-school improvement plan demonstrates a desire to put ICT at the centre of learning to promote students' independence and creativity. This is a shared and well-understood vision which the majority of staff have 'signed up for'. The impact of professional development has been good.
- The ICT department knows its strengths and areas for development though it does not have an up-to-date self-evaluation or development plan that demonstrates this. Management is aware that, while achieving good standards, the current curriculum does not challenge students to achieve the highest levels nor always promote independence.
- Overall, management and leadership show good capacity to improve further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- producing an ICT self-evaluation and development plan to support the systematic improvements that are needed to drive up standards further
- modifying the curriculum in the light of self-evaluation to provide more challenge for the most able and a firm foundation for those wishing to study the subject post-16
- coordinating ICT across all curriculum areas so that teachers can be sure that students bring the necessary ICT knowledge, skills and understanding to their lessons.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop ICT in the school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

John Williams
Additional Inspector