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Mr J Baker
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Baker

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 1 and 2 December 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.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is satisfactory.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is satisfactory.

- School assessment indicates that students attain above average standards at the end of Key Stage 3, though this assessment is not based on a wide range of evidence. By the end of Key Stage 4, students attain satisfactory results; a good proportion of those entered for an examination attain the equivalent of two or three GCSEs grade A* to C. Although baseline assessment is not carried out in Year 7, evidence shows that the majority of students begin school with average ICT knowledge, skills and understanding and make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11. They achieve well in communicating ideas and presenting information but less so in data-logging, programming and sequencing. Other subjects, such as

technology, music, geography and art, contribute well to students' ICT achievements.

- Students' behaviour and their response to teachers are mostly excellent, though at times some students drift off task during teachers' explanations. When provided with the opportunity, students work well together. Their understanding of how to stay safe using technology is sound; the impact of the work by the community police officer has been good but funding for that post has now been withdrawn. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress using ICT when withdrawn from lessons as well as when they are supported in lessons by teaching assistants. Those who have special gifts or talents have access to after-school computer clubs that help them achieve in ICT.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is satisfactory.

- ICT teachers understand the examination criteria very well and provide clear explanations of how to achieve a good grade by the end of the course, responding to students' questions accurately. However, too much teaching is based around imparting knowledge and skills at the expense of developing understanding. Teachers tend to provide answers rather than challenge students to work independently or collaboratively to seek a solution. Hence there is relatively little opportunity for discussion and opportunities to develop literacy skills are missed.
- Where it takes place, the quality of teaching and learning in other subjects using ICT is better. Although variable both across and within subjects, it clearly has some strengths, particularly in technology, music, art, RE and geography. The lack of interactive whiteboards does not help when teachers are trying to teach using ICT. However, mobile technologies are being used well by students.
- Assessment of ICT is carried out very regularly and the monitoring of targets is good. As yet, there is no assessment of ICT in other lessons to inform the overall judgement of students' ICT capability. ICT teaching does not place enough emphasis on peer-assessment.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

- The compressed two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum has some modules relevant to today's students. For example, the Year 7 unit on 'movie making' is well thought out and appropriate. However, there is little focus on control, programming, data-logging or sequencing across the five years of school. Animation is only an option on school 'theme days'. The compulsory ICT curriculum from Year 9 onwards does not provide any option choice of an alternative ICT-related course and around one in three students are not entered for an ICT examination in Year 11. As such, relatively few students say they are interested in continuing to study ICT post-16.

- The teaching and learning of ICT in other subjects are sound but are not monitored or managed by a senior manager and this has led to gaps in provision. Hence the virtual learning environment (VLE) is not as effective as it could be; students are unable to access their work from home or reliably use email to communicate.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is satisfactory.

- There is no up-to-date self-evaluation of ICT and consequently the subject development plan does not contain actions that address teaching and learning. The strategic plan for ICT across the school is not yet based on an evaluation of teachers' ICT knowledge skills and understanding, so does not link to continuing professional development. That said, this is a small school of less than 500 students and much effective liaison between staff goes on informally.
- Senior managers are aware of the strengths and weakness in ICT and are accurate in their assessment of standards, teaching and learning. They know that the present curriculum does not offer good opportunities for all students and are preparing themselves for changes in the next academic year. The strategic resource plan is sound and demonstrates a desire to move to mobile technologies while recognising that the design of the building makes it awkward to achieve this. A more effective VLE is being investigated that would allow students better access to ICT from home. Overall, the school shows satisfactory capacity to improve.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving ICT self-evaluation and action-planning both within ICT as a subject and across the school
- improving the quality of teaching and learning in ICT by providing more opportunities for student independence, decision-making, group or paired work and developing students' ICT understanding and literacy skills
- improving the VLE so that it can be used as an effective tool for teaching and learning.

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