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Dear Mr Baddeley

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 10 and 11 January 2012 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is good.

■ Students achieve well across the whole of the ICT programme of study, including in programming. They achieve particularly well in aspects of media such as web design, video and photo editing. They also acquire good standards in the more complex tools available in commonly used office software such as spreadsheets.

■ In 2011, virtually all students in Year 11 achieved the equivalent of one GCSE in ICT, and many achieved more than this. Students enter the school with attainment that is generally below average; progress to the end of Year 11 is therefore good. This represents a significant improvement from the time of the previous inspection. A few students go

on to study ICT post-16; here results are below average but the numbers are too small to draw any significant conclusions.

- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress well because teaching is differentiated to meet their needs, the curriculum suits them well and they receive good support from teaching assistants. Students behaviour in ICT lessons or when using ICT is good and often excellent; relationships between students are very good. Their speaking skills are not strong, although when given the opportunity they work well together in pairs, listening to each other and building on each other's ideas.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- Teachers' planning is detailed with clear learning objectives that are differentiated to three levels. Interesting and challenging activities are planned that engage the students in their work. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and this means that the environment for teaching and learning is excellent; students respond with enthusiasm and with confidence to questions posed to make sure they understand. All teachers try hard to support the school's drive to raise literacy skills through class reading activities but they do not always take opportunities during the lesson to reinforce understanding of key ICT vocabulary because they are determined that the lesson proceeds to plan. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they answer students' questions confidently and accurately. They deal well with students' errors and misconceptions when they arise, but do not always anticipate them in their planning.

- Teaching using ICT in other subjects is good. There are few interactive whiteboards in the school to allow the students to interact with technology, although projectors and the virtual learning environment (VLE) are used well to promote independent learning. The use of the VLE as a resource for teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Assessment for learning is good; planning is based on an evaluation of students' prior knowledge, skills and understanding. The assessment of ICT is accurate but as yet does not take into account students' ICT achievements in other subjects. The use of target setting to drive up standards is impressive. Students know what level they are working at and what they have to do to reach the next level, and this impacts positively on achievement.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

- The cross-curricular use of ICT is variable across and within subjects. Notable strengths are evident in art, business studies, French, mathematics and the school's specialism, PE. The use of ICT in other subjects has been audited, as have teachers ICT skills, and this has been

used to inform an effective continuing professional development programme. As yet, this information has not been used to inform a whole-school plan for the delivery of ICT.

- The school has a compressed Key Stage 3 curriculum that builds very well on ICT in Key Stage 2. E-safety is dealt with from the outset and then through various modules as they arise, as well as in personal, social and health education and assemblies, but this does not impact as well as it could as it is not strategically planned as a whole. The modules in Key Stage 3 are good; they are well planned and up to date, and include a range of ICT, including media and some computing concepts. The Key Stage 4 course has been reviewed to provide more challenge for students and to provide better progression into post-16, thus encouraging more to follow an ICT-based course after Year 11. All students study an examination course, and overall the Key Stages 3 and 4 courses are broad, balanced and provide challenge. Those opting for extra study in ICT receive a curriculum that is good and one that complements the core ICT well. Those wishing to study ICT in the sixth form have a choice of two routes which meet their needs well.

- The VLE is used very effectively to support the curriculum. Students and teachers use it confidently to set work, transfer work between home and school, and in general to manage teaching and learning. This system makes an excellent contribution to improving ICT standards.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- There has been a significant improvement in standards since 2007. Progress is good for all students. The quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum is now vastly improved. The subject, identified as being underperforming in 2007, has been monitored and supported extremely well by senior managers. It is now well led and much thought goes into making sure that the quality of provision is good and up to date. Effective self-evaluation is based on a national framework and is accurate and up to date, as is the audit of staff expertise. Senior managers are accurate in their evaluation of strengths and areas for development of the ICT department. However, this does not lead into a sharply focused improvement plan. The current plans for ICT as a subject and across the school, while focusing appropriately on improving outcomes for students, do not reflect the good quality of self-evaluation.

- The infrastructure to support the ICT vision is good; it is reliable and technically very well supported. Staff praise the support they receive from the ICT teachers and technical team in their desire to improve their skills. Continuing professional development is taken very seriously and its impact is good. Overall the school shows good capacity to improve ICT further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of teaching by taking more time to develop literacy, ICT vocabulary, speaking skills and addressing common errors and misconceptions
- coordinating cross-curricular ICT, including assessing ICT in other subjects to inform overall assessment of ICT capability and to bring more coherence to the work done across the school on e-safety
- improving development planning.

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