

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs T Luke
Headteacher
The Folkestone School for Girls
Coolinge Lane
Folkestone
CT20 3RB

Dear Mrs Luke

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 12 and 13 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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is outstanding.

- Key Stage 3 results, submitted at the end of Year 8, are well above average. In 2011 all students in Year 10 achieved the equivalent of one GCSE in ICT, with over two thirds doing so at distinction level. AS results are high; over 70% achieved an A or B grade in Year 11, a year earlier than is normal. Results at A level are also high. Students have well-developed skills in multimedia, databases, programming and the more complex functions of commonly used office software. Those in Key Stage 3 use their laptops with confidence and skill. Gifted and talented students are supported well to achieve high standards.
- Students' response to teaching is often outstanding. Their behaviour is excellent; they are self-critical, reflective and can pose challenging

questions. Relationships between students are mutually supportive and excellent.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- The quality of teaching is good; it impacts well on student achievement. Relationships between teachers and students are relaxed which means that students respond with enthusiasm.
- Targets are used well to drive up standards and assessment for learning is embedded. Lesson planning identifies learning objectives for three ability groups; however these objectives are not always explained at the beginning of each lesson which results in some students being unsure of the expected outcome.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and they answer questions accurately and confidently; they deal very well with students' errors and misconceptions when they arise but do not always anticipate them in their planning.
- When given the opportunity, students work extremely well independently or in pairs, but on occasions much work is teacher-directed at the expense of questioning, in a desire to complete the lesson plan. Opportunities are missed to explore some ICT concepts and understanding of key vocabulary. The assessment of ICT is accurate but does not as yet take into account students' ICT achievements in other subjects.
- In other subject lessons there is some excellent teaching using ICT. Many teachers are confident in using ICT and some have created their own websites or written software to help students make progress. Interactive whiteboards are used well and visualisers support the learning.
- The 'Learning Gateway', a school-based virtual learning environment is developing well as a tool for teaching and learning; its phased roll-out in the school is successful.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

- The compressed two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum is demanding and well thought out. It covers all aspects of the national curriculum and more. Some of the activities are very challenging and stimulating; extended projects and enrichment activities are good. Students in Years 7 and 8 find this ICT very enjoyable. Students begin their GCSE course in Year 9 and in previous years this was compulsory for all; currently ICT is an option in Year 9. The school is beginning to monitor those students who did not choose to study ICT to see whether or not they are receiving their subject entitlement.
- The online resources to support the GCSE course, created by the head of department, support the curriculum very well. There is good progression from Year 7 to the sixth form but options to study ICT in other forms, such

as computing, are not currently available. Students develop a view that ICT is a subject that is useful to them when studying other subjects and few consider following an IT-based course into higher education.

- E-safety is covered in ICT lessons throughout the school, and through PHSE and assemblies. It is not strategically planned as a whole and thus progression is not clear.
- The cross-curricular use of ICT has some outstanding examples in geography, history, mathematics and photography. It is at an early stage of whole-school coordination. A useful audit of ICT opportunities in all subjects has been completed and the outcomes are being collated in order to bring cohesion to the ICT curriculum across the school.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- Leadership and management are good because the outcomes are at least good. Self-evaluation is accurate; senior leaders are aware of the strengths and areas for development in ICT and are accurate in their assessment of teaching and learning. The ICT development plan addresses key issues but in making it accessible to a non-specialist reader it has lost some of its potential; it does not, for example, address resourcing or monitoring issues. Continuing professional development is addressed well and is important to the school; it is embedded in all teachers' work. Staff praise the support they receive from the ICT teachers and technical team.
- Access to ICT at the point of learning is good; all students are provided with a laptop computer. There are many suites of computers around the site. The systems are reliable and matched well to the individual needs of subjects. Overall the school shows good capacity to improve ICT further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning through questioning, focusing on students' common errors and misconceptions, and providing more opportunity for discussion of key concepts and vocabulary
- improving development planning
- enriching the curriculum by offering different courses of study.

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