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1 March 2012

Mr G Watson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Watson

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 21 and 22 February 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is satisfactory.

- Baseline assessment of ICT in Year 7 shows that attainment on entry is around the national average. By the end of Year 9 attainment is a little above the national average, although this fluctuates year on year. Students achieve across the whole of the National Curriculum programme of study, including programming, multimedia and common office applications. The relatively few students entered for a GCSE or equivalent examination in Year 11 achieve above average results and for these students progress is good. Those not entered for GCSE achieve the functional skills award. For many students in Key Stage 4, final overall attainment in ICT is dependent upon the subjects chosen and progress is

satisfactory. Sixth form groups are small; attainment at A level is below average but progress is satisfactory.

- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress, but students with special gifts and talents do not always fulfil their potential due to a lack of opportunity to study optional ICT-related courses in Key Stage 4.
- The majority of students' responses to teaching are good and on occasions outstanding, though those in the functional skills group sometimes drift off task. When given the opportunity, students work well together but they are often reluctant speakers. They know their targets and what to do to improve.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching ICT as a subject is variable. Good relationships between teachers and students are a strength in teaching and provide an excellent environment for learning. Teachers' ICT subject knowledge is good and they answer students' questions accurately and with confidence. Teachers understand and apply the examination criteria well. Some teaching involves imaginative ways of introducing a topic but in other lessons, time is wasted with low-level tasks and progress can be slow when teachers over-control the pace of the lessons. This approach to teaching leads to missed opportunities both to develop students' understanding of ICT concepts further and to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Some good teaching is in using ICT in other subjects. A number of teachers are confident in their use of ICT, often due to the excellent training they are given by the school ICT specialists during whole-school training days.
- The assessment of ICT is regular and accurate and targets are used well to drive up standards, but no assessment of ICT in other subjects is used to inform overall progress in ICT. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is not an effective tool for teaching and learning; teachers and students do not enjoy using it, mainly because of technical issues which affect its ease of use.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

- The ICT curriculum in Key Stage 3 is sound and covers all aspects of the programme of study. All students follow an ICT functional skills element in Key Stage 4 which is inappropriate for some as it lacks challenge. The routes into Key Stage 4 are narrow and some students are not able to follow other ICT-based courses because of clashes in their option choices. The sixth form has one ICT course on offer and this results in small numbers choosing to follow ICT. As a consequence, few students go on to study ICT in higher education.

- Students receive an ICT curriculum in other subjects that is dependent both upon both the subjects they have chosen to study and the interests of their individual teachers. The curriculum is enhanced by the opportunities teachers make to use ICT and media applications in their teaching and learning. Subject teachers' use of ICT, such as in mathematics, English and physics, impacts positively on students' progress. The opportunities that teachers make to use ICT and new technologies in their lessons has not been documented and no overall curriculum plan is in place to ensure progression for every student through Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Students are taught how to stay safe using technology but not in specific ICT lessons or in personal development time. Consequently the impact on students' understanding of e-safety and how to stay safe using technology across the school is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is satisfactory.

- The absence of a whole-school development plan for ICT that builds on accurate self-evaluation and which focuses on improving outcomes for students means that there is not a shared vision for ICT across the school. The lack of a strategic plan for resource allocation has resulted in the school having to find considerable funding at short notice to ensure that the ICT systems continue to function.
- Senior staff are accurate in their evaluation of teaching and learning. The ICT department has regularly and accurately assessed its performance and produced an improvement plan. Strategic leadership of ICT as a subject is good, with a clear understanding of what the school needs to do to achieve high standards. The school shows satisfactory capacity to improve.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the strategic leadership and management of ICT across the school through better self-evaluation and improvement planning
- improving progression through the curriculum by developing a wider range of choices for students to study an ICT-based course at examination level, as well as mapping ICT across the school so that all staff are aware of how they can contribute to the achievement and assessment of students in ICT
- improving the VLE and the general ICT infrastructure so that they become useful tools for teaching and learning
- bringing all ICT teaching and learning up to the quality of the best now taking place by focussing on investigative approaches that both challenge students and address their understanding of key ICT concepts and vocabulary.

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.

Yours sincerely

John Williams
Additional Inspector