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Mr D Baker
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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 your staff and students, during my visit on 23 and 24 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is good.

■ Students in Key Stage 3 make good progress. End of Key Stage assessments, carried out a year early in Year 8, show students attain a little above the national expectation, although results have fluctuated over the last three years. Students achieve well across the whole of the programme of study including in programming and in many aspects of media. All students are entered for a national award at the end of Year 11 and the majority achieve an equivalent of one GCSE. This is a relatively new school with currently its first cohort of Year 13 students. A significant proportion of these students have chosen to study an ICT-related course in higher education. The school tracks students carefully and these results

show that the majority make good progress to achieve at or above their target.

- Until recently those with special gifts and talents have not always had opportunities to progress and achieve the highest levels. The school has recognised this and brought in new GCSE and A-level computing courses to address the issue. Those students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because the school puts an emphasis on inclusion. Students receive particularly good support from their peers because the ethos for learning and working together is so strong throughout the school. Students' responses to teaching are good and often outstanding; they listen to each other and speak with confidence and fluency. They know their targets and what to do to improve. Their understanding of e-safety and how to stay safe using technology is good.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- Many teachers are confident and skilful users of ICT and know when to use technology appropriately. For example, a good mathematics lesson used the interactive whiteboard imaginatively to promote understanding of shape, and a lesson in science using the students' 'smart phones' very effectively promoted independent learning. Interactive whiteboards are in every classroom and at times used well, but opportunities are missed to reinforce ICT concepts or enliven teaching because they are often only used as a projector screen. The quality of teaching of ICT as a subject is variable. At times opportunities are missed to develop students' understanding of keywords or general literacy skills and, as in other subjects, the whiteboard is not always used interactively to reinforce concepts. Teachers have good subject knowledge and answer students' question accurately but the lack of a consistent investigative approach or planning for students' common errors and misconceptions can slow down the pace of learning.

- ICT is assessed regularly and accurately, although the ICT that students study in other subjects does not contribute to their overall assessment. Sometimes the knowledge, skills and understanding that students bring from outside school are not built on in lessons, although one very effective lesson began with a 'current issues' discussion where students were able to demonstrate their understanding of some up to date ICT developments. In this case the teacher effectively assessed their knowledge before proceeding to the main body of the lesson.

- Homework is set regularly, and at times using the virtual learning environment (VLE). A new VLE is being developed appropriately as a tool for teaching and learning but presently the old one is not as effective as it could be, especially in Key Stage 4, because of technical issues.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

- The ICT curriculum is good and is developing well. Crucially, it is continually developing as a result of an analysis of its impact on students' achievement. Students can choose to follow academic or vocational courses in ICT and computing. These options provide all students with the opportunity to achieve in ICT and the range of courses is very well thought out and much appreciated by students. The Key Stage 3 course, compressed into two years, is similarly well thought out with a focus on developing students' understanding rather than just their skills. An early focus on e-safety has a good impact on students' understanding of how to stay safe using technology.

- The curriculum is enhanced by the use of a wide range of media-based resources including recording and TV studios. The use of ICT is embedded in a number of other subjects but as yet this is not coordinated or mapped in any meaningful way that would ensure progression in ICT across the school.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- A clear and well-articulated vision for ICT is in place across the school. Many staff are exceptionally keen to promote effective learning and do so well using new technologies. The school has a strong commitment to continuing professional development (CPD), although it is not strategically managed as an outcome from ICT improvement planning.

- Senior managers are accurate in their assessment of standards, teaching and learning in ICT. Self-evaluation of ICT has led to accurate planning that focuses on improving attainment for students. For example, the ICT courses offered to students from September 2012 are based on a thorough evaluation of what works for the students, and takes into account the current national debate about widening ICT participation in computing and digital media. The school has made good progress in improving achievement in ICT in recent years and shows good capacity to improve further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- bringing the quality of teaching and learning up to the best in the school by planning to overcome students' common errors and misconceptions, developing a consistent investigative approach to teaching, and focusing on developing key ICT concepts and vocabulary

- linking self-evaluation and improvement planning to identifying opportunities for continuing professional development and improving resourcing

- improving progression through the curriculum by developing the cross-curricular mapping of ICT.

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