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Mrs S Jowett
Principal
George Spencer Academy and
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Arthur Mee Road
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Dear Mrs Jowett

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 6 and 7 March 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 including two observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is good.

- Students begin in Year 7 with levels of attainment which are above the national average. By the end of Year 9, almost all students achieve a vocational award in ICT. Students who opt to study ICT in Key Stage 4 expand their vocational award and make good progress, but the other half of the year group receive significantly less ICT teaching and make weaker progress. A number of students choose to study applied ICT or computing in the sixth form and these students make at least good progress.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well in ICT lessons and by teaching assistants at other times and make similar progress to their peers.

- Students' responses to teaching and their behaviour in lessons are good. They are keen to learn and know their targets and what to do to achieve a higher grade. They listen to each other and when given the opportunity work well either in groups or independently. In all lessons seen, when using new technologies, they respected each other, the staff and the equipment.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- All teachers of ICT have excellent subject knowledge, and in the best lessons use this and a wide range of resources to plan activities which engage and motivate students. For example, in a Year 12 ICT lesson students worked in pairs to investigate the use of advanced queries in databases. The students were keen to begin the task and their progress was supported by good behaviour and highly effective support from the teacher. In less effective lessons, teaching focuses too much on the development of basic skills and learning can become too teacher-focused.
- The assessment of work in ICT lessons is excellent. Students are aware of their end-of-year targets and their teachers ensure that they know how to achieve them.
- The use of ICT to support learning across the school is more variable. Students have good access to ICT in other subjects but its use is not coordinated with the ICT curriculum and in some lessons this lowers the expectations of teachers and limits the progress made. In one Year 9 electronics lesson, the excellent resources available and the high-quality ICT skills of the teacher led to outstanding progress with students able to confidently describe the advantages and disadvantages of computer-aided design. However, in other areas of the curriculum the use of ICT is limited to research and presentation and student progress in ICT is not monitored.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

- All students at Key Stage 3 receive their entitlement to the statutory ICT National Curriculum during ICT lessons. Students enjoy the vocational curriculum in Year 9 but are less positive about the areas of work they cover in Years 7 and 8.
- The vocational curriculum provided at Key Stage 4 for students who opt to study ICT is appropriate for many students and the school is flexible in choosing contexts which will be relevant and of interest. However, few opportunities exist in other curriculum areas for those who do not opt to study ICT beyond the core curriculum, to develop their skills. This work is not currently monitored or assessed, and this can lower the expectations of teachers and so limit the progress made.

- The school has plans to develop the Key Stage 4 curriculum to increase choice and better meet the needs of more able students. In the sixth form, students can choose between vocational ICT and computing courses and this flexibility better meets the needs of all students. Students of all ages have access to an excellent range of enrichment activities which promotes their learning and engagement with the subject.
- Students are supported to learn how to become responsible users of new technologies through ICT lessons and the citizenship curriculum and have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The impact of this teaching on the students' understanding of e-safety is good.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- Senior leaders and managers have a good overview of strengths and weaknesses in ICT. They are well informed of current developments in the subject and effective self-evaluation has informed the ICT development plan. The present curriculum at Key Stage 4 does not offer good opportunities for all students and the school is planning significant changes to this curriculum for the next academic year.
- The use of ICT to set and monitor students' targets across the school is very good and well embedded but at times this information is not used by teachers to plan lessons which challenge all abilities.
- Access to ICT equipment in the school is excellent. The school provides regular opportunities for student support at lunchtime and at after-school clubs. The active use of the virtual learning environment in all areas of the curriculum is enhancing students' achievement and has contributed to their good progress. Technical support is good and ensures that systems are reliable and available when needed.
- Well-planned and effective training has been provided for all staff and this has enhanced their ICT knowledge and understanding. The use of students as digital leaders to engage and support staff is outstanding.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further improving the quality of students' learning and their progress in ICT by:
 - developing the ICT curriculum at Key Stage 4 to better challenge and enthuse students of all abilities
 - ensuring that the use of ICT in other subjects is more effectively monitored and linked to the work of the ICT department.

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

David Brown
Additional Inspector