

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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Mr A Brady
Headteacher
Woodlands School
Blenheim Drive
Allestree
Derby
DE22 2LW

Dear Mr Brady

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 7 and 8 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 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is satisfactory.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is satisfactory.

- Students begin school with standards in ICT that are above the national average and by the end of Key Stage 3 they remain above average. GCSE results have also been above average for a number of years, although many students do not study an accredited course in ICT in Key Stage 4. The current Year 11 students opting to follow ICT as an option have been preparing for a different examination from previous cohorts and they are on target to achieve results more in line with national expectations. Very few go on to study at advanced level.
- Students in Key Stage 3 achieve particularly well with databases and spreadsheets but less so in other aspects of ICT. Across the school, students' response to teaching is at least good and often outstanding but

they do not always feel comfortable speaking in front of others. Progress for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good because of the positive ethos for learning in classes.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is satisfactory.

- ICT teachers try hard to teach well; they plan potentially good lessons in great detail and aim to begin lessons with interesting starter activities. Relationships are very good between teachers and students so that paired and group work, when used, is effective. Although teachers' subject knowledge is good, at times the approach to teaching does not match the intended outcome because teachers focus too much on their teaching rather than on the students' learning. The result is that sometimes too much time is spent on teacher talk, and progress in learning is slow. Opportunities are missed for students to use ICT because of a focus on recording on paper. The desire to closely follow the lesson plan means that opportunities are also missed to develop understanding through literacy. Little use is made of the available interactive whiteboards to promote further understanding of ICT concepts.
- Teachers of other subjects use ICT appropriately in their teaching; much teaching is done using the projector and presentation software. Where interactive whiteboards are used, such as in mathematics and languages, they are used effectively, and visualisers are used to promote learning. Some opportunities are taken to develop students' ICT capability alongside the subject being taught, as observed in an outstanding graphics lesson where the teacher took time to make sure the students understood different file formats; at these times, progression in ICT is good. Portable technologies such as laptops are also used well, although limited numbers are available.
- Students' ICT capability is assessed regularly. An initial baseline assessment in Year 7 is used to set targets for the ends of Years 7, 8 and 9. Target setting and monitoring underpins much of what the school does to drive up standards. However, the ICT that students achieve in other subjects does not inform the overall assessment of their ICT capability and the school is working on ways of monitoring this, especially for those students in Keys Stage 4 who do not follow an ICT-accredited course.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

- The curriculum in Years 7 and 8 is planned in detail but does not build well on some of the work students have done in primary school; it lacks some breadth and challenge. In Year 9, all students follow an accredited course but this is narrow and focuses almost entirely on spreadsheets and databases. As a consequence, relatively few students, and in particular girls, are finding ICT exciting and small numbers choose to take ICT further. Many that do study ICT in Years 10 and 11 find progression to

GCSE difficult. The Key Stage 3 curriculum does not prepare students well for Key Stage 4. The impact of this is that even fewer students choose to follow an ICT course in the sixth form. The school is currently considering how to best provide more choice in Key Stage 4 and encourage more students to study the subject.

- The application of ICT in other curriculum areas is not recorded and shared in a way that helps teachers provide precise opportunities for students to apply or extend their ICT capability. In addition, the impact that some subjects could have on ICT capability is limited by the lack of their use of media technologies.
- Students acquire a satisfactory understanding of how to stay safe using computers.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is satisfactory.

- Resources have been appropriately targeted at providing an effective and stable infrastructure. Current plans to extend the wireless capability to all areas of this large site and to provide more mobile technologies are good. The school is developing a vision for ICT by promoting its use, for example by having 'QR' codes on walls in a number of corridors that encourage students to use their own technology to investigate more. Self-evaluation and review is accurate and based both on lesson observations and an analysis of examination results; it does not formally take into account student perceptions. The set of actions stemming from self-evaluation addresses some of the issues identified, but it is not fed into a subject-development plan that focuses on improving outcomes for students.
- A useful whole-school development plan focuses on resources but does not show how ICT across the curriculum can impact on teaching, learning and achievement. In addition, although continued professional development has been effective in many subjects and teachers speak highly of the individual support given by technicians and the assistant headteacher with responsibility for ICT, it is not strategically planned as an outcome from the self-evaluation.
- Senior managers are accurate in their evaluation of teaching and learning. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in ICT in the school and a desire to improve outcomes for students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the curriculum in Key Stage 3 to provide a better foundation for students to make informed choices about Key Stage 4
- improving the evaluation and development planning process so that it focuses clearly on improving outcomes for students
- managing the ICT curriculum across the school by identifying the opportunities students have to apply and extend their ICT knowledge, skills and understanding

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