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Mr K McGrane
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McGrane

Ofsted 2012–13 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 28 and 29 May 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 management team.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is good.

- Students begin in Year 9 with levels of attainment which are well below the national average. During Year 9 they make satisfactory progress although only a small number of students achieve higher levels. In Key Stage 4, all students follow a core vocational ICT course with additional accreditation available as an option choice. Students following these courses make good progress. The progress of those students who study ICT in the sixth form is also good.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well in ICT lessons. High-quality support and good access to ICT facilities mean that these students make good progress.

- In the majority of lessons students behave well, although at times some students drift off task during teachers' explanations. Students work well together and are articulate and highly enthusiastic about using ICT.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, are confident users of ICT, and in the majority of lessons plan work which engages and motivates students. However, in some lessons all the students were asked to do the same tasks. This lack of differentiation and pace can limit students' progress and in these lessons learning can become too teacher-focused.
- Teachers make learning objectives clear to students at the beginning of each lesson so that there is a shared expectation of what it is required. The assessment of work in ICT lessons is excellent. Students are very aware of their end of year targets and their teachers ensure that they know how to achieve them. Target-setting has been a key feature in improving attainment over the last three years.
- The use of ICT to support learning across the school is satisfactory and improving. Students have good access to ICT and it is used appropriately in many lessons to develop their learning. However, the use of ICT in other curriculum areas is not coordinated with the ICT curriculum.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

- All students in Year 9 receive their entitlement to the statutory ICT National Curriculum during ICT lessons. The school is planning to update the scheme of work to increase challenge to students.
- The vocational curriculum currently provided at Key Stage 4 for all students is appropriate, although it does not always challenge the most able. The school is about to introduce an academic pathway in ICT which will include an option to study computer science. These changes will provide a number of curriculum choices to support the interests of all students.
- ICT teachers make very effective use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) to help students manage their work and bridge the home-school divide. Resources for learning are increasingly available to students on the system.
- The school places a very high priority on keeping children safe when using ICT and e-safety teaching within the school is outstanding. Students are supported to learn how to become responsible users of new technologies through ICT lessons, guidance sessions and through assemblies. Discussions with students confirm that they have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe both at school and at home. The school informs and regularly updates staff and parents of e-safety issues.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- ICT is well led at senior management levels and departmental levels. The vision for the subject is clear and effective, including a school-wide expectation that ICT is integrated into learning in all areas of the school and that up-to-date technology is used by all teachers.
- Senior managers are aware of the strengths and weakness in ICT and are accurate in their assessment of standards, teaching and learning. They know that the current curriculum does not challenge students to achieve the highest levels and have planned significant changes for the next academic year.
- Well-planned and engaging training has been provided for all staff and this, together with effective support from staff in the ICT department, has enhanced their knowledge and understanding. Technical support is good and ensures that systems are reliable and available when needed.
- The use of ICT to set and monitor students' targets across the school is outstanding and is well embedded. The school has demonstrated, and continues to demonstrate, good capacity to improve ICT.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further improving the quality of students' learning and their progress in ICT by:
 - implementing planned developments in the ICT curriculum to increase challenge and interest in the subject for students
 - ensuring that the use of ICT in other subjects is linked to the work of the ICT department
 - developing the use of the VLE across the school to enable students have better online access to curriculum resources.

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