6 July 2012

Mrs S Forde
Headteacher
Cavendish School
Warners End Road
Hemel Hempstead
Hertfordshire
HP1 3DW

Dear Mrs Forde

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 18 and 19 June 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 satisfactory.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is satisfactory.

■ The small numbers of students studying A level applied ICT achieve above-average results and most students in Year 11 gain the equivalent of one GCSE in ICT. By the end of Year 9, students attain average results but the reported levels are based on a narrow band of study and do not take into account students' achievements in ICT in other subjects. In the past, few have achieved the higher levels in Key Stage 4, but the focus on improving this during the year means that a significantly increased percentage now achieve, or are in line to achieve, the higher grades. Students have strengths in their understanding of business applications but are less strong in the media studies and computer science aspects of ICT, including programming, due to the nature of the curriculum on offer.

- Students' behaviour is good; they respond to ICT teaching well. Across the school a calm and productive ethos for learning is in place.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is satisfactory.

- ICT specialists know the examination specification and focus on students' targets, but sometimes this is at the expense of developing more general ICT capability as some teaching places too much emphasis on the business application rather than the ICT. Hence, opportunities to develop students' understanding of key ICT concepts are missed. Teachers plan the lessons to have an appropriate mix of activities, including group and paired work, but too many mini-plenaries and weak transitions results in slower student progress. Questioning is not always demanding. Teachers' planning is good at identifying opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the concentration on improving students' literacy skills is impressive, although not all teachers model good writing on the whiteboards. In one effective session the teacher used the model of 'student experts' exceptionally well to promote greater learning through group work.

- Some very good use of ICT in other subjects takes place. For example, ICT is being used effectively to help students who have weaker reading skills. In PE and geography students are encouraged to make choices about the appropriateness of ICT and thus they discriminate about which ICT tools to use. An unusual and extremely effective aspect of a geography lesson was the allocation of 'five minute tokens' that students used to buy a slot of time on the computer. This really focussed students on being clear about using ICT effectively as a research tool.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

- The existing taught ICT programme across the school provides progression but is focussed on business applications and does not provide a good foundation for options in Key Stage 4. The school is aware of this and has made good progress in developing an improved curriculum to begin in September 2012. The current Year 7 curriculum has been designed to make best use of the expertise of a large number of non-specialist teachers. While this was a good idea to maximise staff expertise, it has resulted in a narrow, skills–based curriculum that does not give much emphasis to the strands of multimedia, computer science and programming. The Year 9 curriculum prepares students for the vocational course beginning in Year 10. Some liaison takes place with other departments about their use of ICT but as yet this is not brought together in a meaningful way to provide progression in ICT across the school, and the assessment of ICT does not take into account that which students achieve in other subjects.

- The curriculum is enhanced by a virtual leaning environment which has become more effective this year and teachers and students are using it as a tool for setting and receiving homework. Older students find the available examination resources particularly useful.

- Students' understanding of how to stay safe using the internet is satisfactory. E-safety is covered in ICT lessons, in assemblies and in the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is satisfactory.

- Outcomes for students in terms of examination results are satisfactory overall. The responses students make to teaching are good and teaching is satisfactory. A new emphasis placed on the setting, development and monitoring of targets is having an impact on raising achievement, particularly for those capable of achieving the higher levels. Students know their targets and what they have to do to improve.

- Staffing issues such as the absence of a member of staff have been dealt with well with little impact on students' progress. Year 7 will no longer be taught by non-specialists from next September. Some good thought has gone into changing the curriculum in Key Stage 3 to better meet the changing national scene in the subject.

- Senior managers are accurate in their assessment of teaching and learning. They have focused successfully on improving the overall quality of teaching and eradicating inadequate teaching. Self-evaluation is excellent, uses a range of evidence and is monitored against the Ofsted criteria. The action plan emerging is accurate although as yet does not inform an ICT professional development programme. Significant improvement has occurred in the last twelve months and as such the school demonstrates good capacity to improve ICT further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving teaching by focusing on key ICT concepts rather than the course specification, managing transitions between parts of lessons better and improving the depth of questioning

- improving the ICT curriculum by placing a sharper focus on the component parts of media, applications and computer science

- improving the coherence of ICT across the school in terms of its management and assessment, and identifying progressive opportunities for students to enhance and extend their ICT skills in other subjects.

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

John Williams
Additional Inspector