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6 July 2012

Mr J Burridge
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Burridge

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 20 and 21 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is good.

- Students begin in Year 7 with standards that are mostly at or below national expectations. They make good progress so that by the end of Year 9 they are achieving above the national average although fewer are achieving the higher levels. Examination results are good with all students gaining the equivalent of one GCSE in ICT and many going further to achieve two or three equivalent GCSEs in a vocational qualification. A significant number of students go on to study ICT-related courses at local post-16 providers. Across Key Stages 3 and 4 students have strengths in the business applications aspects of the subject but are less strong in the media studies and computer science aspects of ICT, including programming.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make excellent progress due to effective targeted support. Teachers know the needs of these students very well and the ethos for learning in the classroom is excellent.
- Students' behaviour is excellent; they respond very well to adults and to each other, working together and supporting each other to achieve. They are keen to contribute to lessons and clearly enjoy what they are doing.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- ICT-specialist teachers have good knowledge of the examination specification, which means they can accurately show students what they need to do to achieve a higher grade; teachers answer students' questions precisely. Lessons are planned in detail to include individual, paired and group activities, and the focus on peer assessment means that students both give and take constructive criticism very well. Students are very aware of their targets and levels. Teachers prepare good resources that meet the needs of the individual student. Sometimes teachers try to fit too much into the one-hour lessons. This results in missed opportunities to reinforce key ICT concepts and a tendency for lessons to be too teacher-led at the expense of an investigate approach.
- Good and sometimes outstanding use is made of ICT in other subjects. ICT is used appropriately as a tool for teaching and learning. Teachers often use ICT imaginatively, for example in a history lesson the teacher used a video clip that was enhanced with a moving subtitle. This challenged the students to ask questions about what they were seeing in the video. The outstanding ICT facilities being developed through the new building programme are being used well by teachers to model good practice in ICT, although sometimes opportunities are missed to pick up and develop students' ICT capability or to assess their ICT capability as the lesson progresses.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

- The taught ICT programme in Years 7 and 8 provides progression through a range of topics, although media and computer science are not represented in any great depth. The Year 9 curriculum prepares students effectively for the vocational course beginning in Year 10. Some good liaison is in place with other departments so that, for example, some collaborative planning is undertaken to deliver spreadsheet work between the mathematics and ICT departments.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been modified to allow some students to follow ICT GCSE in Year 10. Some tracking occurs of students' ICT exposure in other subjects, but this is not in sufficient detail yet, and students' achievements using ICT in other subjects are not assessed with a view to informing the overall assessment of ICT capability.

- The curriculum is enhanced by a virtual learning environment which technically works well and has become much more effective in the last 12 months. Students are keen to use the system to access their work and are beginning to expect this to be the preferred medium for communication about items such as homework.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- Outcomes for students in terms of examination results are good and progress is also good. The response students make to teaching is excellent and, overall, teaching is good. Students know their targets and what they have to do to improve and many achieve above their targets.
- The infrastructure, hardware and applications have become much more reliable as the new building works settle down so that teachers and students have access to ICT that works well as and when they need it. All teaching areas have interactive whiteboards and portable technology enhances many lessons.
- Some turbulence in staffing within the department has been dealt with well so that there has been no negative impact on students' progress. A clear vision for ICT is acknowledged by all although this is not represented well in documentation. For example, the ICT department's self-review is not sharp enough to address key issues to improve the subject. Consequently the department's development plan does not identify subject needs but instead relates mainly to whole-school issues.
- Senior managers are accurate in their assessment of standards, teaching and learning. The school shows good capacity to improve further in ICT.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing lessons that use a more investigative approach and focus on identifying and teaching key ICT concepts rather than just the course specification
- improving the ICT subject self-evaluation and planning documents so that continuing professional development needs are met
- improving progression through the curriculum by coordinating the cross-curricular use of ICT and using assessment of ICT in other subjects to inform curriculum planning.

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