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Dear Mrs Owen

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on the 6-7 December 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at ICT, the visit had a particular focus on the assessment of ICT and the readiness of the school for the onscreen Key Stage 3 ICT test.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be outstanding

Achievement and standards in ICT

Overall achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Pupils join the school in Year 7 with below average skills in ICT and by the end of year Key Stage 3 their standard of attainment is above the national average. This represents very good achievement particularly at the higher levels.

- The standards reached by pupils in the GNVQ ICT at the end of Key Stage 4 are high and this represents excellent progress given that almost all pupils follow this course. The standard of work being produced by pupils in Years 9 and 10 on the new OCR Diploma course is also very high.
- Pupils draw extensively upon their own experiences of ICT when given the freedom to design their own solutions to imaginative tasks. They show a good appreciation of use of ICT in the wider world although those following the OCR Diploma course would benefit from increased opportunities to gain first hand experience of ICT within the workplace.
- The development of pupils' ICT capability varies across the curriculum but is carefully monitored and mapped against the ICT programmes of study. The quality of pupils work in art and engineering for example is enhanced through the effective use of specialist software. The assessment and recording of this and other cross-curricular provision could be used more effectively to measure pupil attainment in ICT.
- Pupils' ability to critically review, modify and evaluate their work and that of others is extremely well developed and this enables them to develop higher order ICT skills and capability.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is outstanding.

- ICT teachers have extensive knowledge of their subject, particularly the requirements of the vocational examination courses. There are good opportunities for all staff to extend their expertise in the use of specialist software such as digital photography, video editing and animation. More opportunities for all staff to use this training to gain formal accreditation could be provided.
- All lessons observed were at least good and all had outstanding features. In one outstanding lesson Year 10 pupils were given excellent opportunities to use ICT to be creative and independent learners. As a result they produced complex sound files for inclusion into their high quality multimedia presentations. In another outstanding lesson, the imaginative and effective use of ICT enabled pupils to extend and articulate their thorough understanding of the purpose and use of propaganda in Nazi Germany.
- In all the lessons observed pupils showed themselves to be inquisitive and highly motivated learners. The very good relationships between teachers and pupils was a feature of each of the lessons as was the teachers' encouragement for pupils to try out different aspects of ICT and to share these with one another.
- All lessons demonstrated that teachers have high expectations of pupils. Pupils adhere to clear protocols for the use of ICT resources and for behaviour in general. Lessons are very well planned to enable all pupils to be purposeful and active participants.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the ICT curriculum is outstanding

- The school is making outstanding provision for all pupils to study ICT as a discrete subject. The extended provision in Year 7 provides excellent opportunities for pupils of all ability to successfully complete the Key Stage 3 curriculum by the end of Year 8.
- ICT resources are well organised to provide as much access as possible for staff and pupils. All pupils and staff can log onto the school network from home via terminal services. Staff and pupils make very good use of this facility to access their work, email and school based software.
- The school's involvement in innovative projects such as the national e-Mentoring project is beneficial to the target group of learners. This and other initiatives such as the E-learning days, the specialist ICT clubs and projects for talented and gifted pupils, provide excellent opportunities for them to develop valuable ICT skills and to work flexibly and independently.
- Pupils' enjoy many elements of the curriculum, particularly being able to use industry standard software and to complete real and interesting tasks. Good use is made of national strategy materials at Key Stage 3. These resources could be further customised and adapted to exploit the ability of pupils in ICT and possibly include their use of ICT in other subjects.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The ICT manager provides outstanding leadership which ensures that standards continue to improve in ICT. Roles and responsibilities within the department are clear and as a result, course management is also outstanding. All subject documentation is extremely comprehensive and informative and provides excellent guidance on policies, procedures and protocols to enable new staff in particular to feel confident and well supported.
- There is an excellent vision for ICT to become embedded within the curriculum. All departments are required to identify targets for the integration of ICT which are also embedded in the school development plan. There are innovative ideas to improve access to ICT and tackle the enormous constraints that the design and fabric of the school buildings present.
- The departmental self evaluation process is effective and demonstrates an excellent understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in ICT. Areas for improvement are well communicated and demonstrate a clear emphasis on continuing to raise standards and improve achievement in ICT.

Assessment of ICT and the readiness of the school for the onscreen Key Stage 3 ICT test

Assessment in ICT is outstanding.

- The school has a remarkably comprehensive system for assessing pupils' standards and tracking their progress in ICT. This provides an accurate assessment of their standards shortly after they join the school and enables challenging targets to be set for every pupil. Teachers use the information generated to provide excellent guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve. Pupils and staff speak very highly of the new electronic assessment system.
- Pupils find it easy to identify those aspects of their ICT capability which are in need of improvement. There is extensive evidence of pupils being involved in assessing their own and each other's work. They respond extremely well to the positive, regular and informative academic guidance they receive.
- The school is generally well prepared for the onscreen Key Stage 3 ICT test and they are aware of the limitations of the new ICT equipment. Considerable discussion is taking place to ensure that pupils are well prepared for the pilot test in 2007.

Inclusion

The subject's contribution to the inclusion of students is outstanding

- This is an inclusive school which works very hard to ensure that all pupils are equally involved in ICT. Lower attaining pupils in particular are helped to improve the quality of the presentation of their work, which raises their self-confidence and levels of self-esteem. Those with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well cared for and they make very good progress.
- All pupils benefit from opportunities to use the school's computers outside of lesson times. This ensures that none are disadvantaged when completing homework or research. The well designed courses enables pupils of all abilities to gain valuable skills to enable them to make a positive contribution to the community and the world of work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- enhance the study of the ICT industry in Key Stage 4 through increased links with local employers
- use examples of pupils' ICT work in other subjects in the assessment of their capability

- enable staff to acquire formal accreditation following their professional development courses in ICT.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ICT in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Cathy Morgan
Her Majesty's Inspector