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16 October 2006

Mr M Braidley  
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Dear Mr Braidley

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 9-10 October 2006 to look at work in ICT.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of 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 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with senior and middle managers, discussions with pupils from Years 9,10 and 11, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of Information and Communication Technology was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in ICT are inadequate.

- Standards in ICT are below average. Pupils make inadequate progress and underachieve.

- The proportion of Year 9 pupils achieving National Curriculum Level 5 or higher, in their end of year national tests, is substantially lower than that for English, mathematics or science.
- GCSE results in the last two years in the full course, have been well below average, particularly in the number of pupils achieving A\* or A grades.
- Specialist College status is having a strong impact through the positive way pupils use ICT to support their learning and improve their standards in science and mathematics.
- Pupils with physical difficulties make excellent progress because of the innovative use of new technology.
- Pupils enjoy using computers and they collaborate well when sharing a computer or working in pairs or groups.
- The school does not have a home-school Internet agreement in place.

### Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is inadequate.

- Teachers try hard to encourage and motivate pupils but too few of them have sufficient expertise in ICT to teach it effectively.
- Teachers do their best to encourage and motivate pupils to want to learn.
- Planning does not take sufficient account of the differing abilities of pupils. There is too little challenge for the higher attaining pupils.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate.

- There are good curriculum links with local primary schools and colleges.
- Extra-curricular provision is good. Pupils enjoy using computers to do coursework and research during breaks, lunch-times and after school.
- ICT is not used effectively to support learning in all curriculum areas
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum lacks sufficient breadth; for example, there are no vocational courses in ICT on offer to pupils.
- In Key Stage 4, the timetabling of the subject as an option is too restrictive and the proportion of pupils who take a full GCSE course is low.

### Leadership and management of ICT

The leadership and management of ICT are inadequate.

- Leadership and management at all levels have been ineffective in raising standards and pupils' achievement in ICT.

- There is no whole-school vision or strategy to enable the school to improve its current unsatisfactory provision.
- The lack of resources and long term staffing difficulties, particularly budgetary restrictions preventing the recruitment of specialist ICT teachers, have sapped the school's zest for bringing about improvement in ICT.
- Science College status has brought new investment in the last eighteen months and the number of computers in the school is now average for a school of this size; insufficient access to other resources, such as interactive whiteboards and digital cameras is having a detrimental impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The lack of school and departmental policies and planning and evaluation procedures is preventing improvement in ICT.

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

Assessment is inadequate.

- The progress pupils make in ICT is not adequately tracked as they move through the school.
- Attainment targets have recently been introduced but these are not yet regularly reviewed and readjusted.
- Assessment does not inform planning; for example, how pupils are grouped in lessons.
- The school has been involved in the pilot on-screen testing at the end of Year 9 for the past two years and is well prepared for when the test becomes compulsory. Results from the tests have not yet been reported back to the school.

### Inclusion

This is an inclusive school. Vulnerable pupils and pupils with learning, emotional and/or physical difficulties are greatly valued. The care of pupils with physical difficulties is outstanding and they make excellent progress in their learning. Higher attaining pupils do not make sufficient progress because of inadequate teaching and a lack of curriculum support.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop a strategic plan for ICT which shows clearly how, and by when, standards and achievement in ICT will improve at least to match those of English and mathematics
- improve the quality of teaching and learning in ICT by implementing an effective monitoring and intervention programme by leaders and managers at all levels

- develop a rigorous assessment policy through which pupils will know how well they are doing in relation to national norms and use this data to set appropriate and challenging targets for all pupils
- review the curriculum to improve the proportion of pupils who are able to achieve a full GCSE, or equivalent qualification.

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

Joe Clark  
Additional Inspector