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Mr M Rushby
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Dear Mr Rushby

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on the 10-11 of October to look at work in ICT. Also, please pass my thanks to your pupils who were keen to talk about their work and were courteous and helpful not only in classrooms but around the school generally.

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.

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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory and improving.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory

- Pupils' attainment in ICT remains below the national average, but there are clear improvements in achievement and progress. Attainment has improved at the end of Year 9. Many pupils are not confident with ICT when they arrive at the school, but they improve so that around half from last year's Year 9, gained the expected level of capability. Current assessments indicate that more focussed teaching in all year groups is improving that figure.

- At year 11 too, there are signs of improvement in the full GCSE course, but not in the short course in 2006.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about showing their skills and confidence in using ICT applications for presentation and display. Pupils are generally good at making work look attractive, searching for information and copying it into a new document. Work could be improved further by students having a better sense of a real-world purpose and audience. Almost all pupils spoken with say that they enjoy their ICT work. Their ability to present information well is improving the self-esteem of many. Pupils treat their new ICT rooms and equipment with respect.
- Few pupils use a structure to organise their files. There is yet little use of spreadsheets to model real life or organise information in a database. Current schemes of work now include these areas and teachers are aware of the need to help pupils understand what are generally more difficult ICT aspects for them.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers are confident and competent. Lessons observed were satisfactory and good, although one lesson did not meet its overall objectives, partly because of the inattention of some pupils. Teachers plan and structure lessons well and share lesson objectives with students. Classes are generally well managed with evident good relationships between staff and pupils.
- The school's rewards and sanctions system is used consistently most of the time. Pupils and teachers report that this is effective in improving behaviour and creating a better environment for learning.
- Assessment is managed well. Moderation is thorough and the head of department is very clear that the award of national curriculum levels must be accurate. That precision could be usefully included in all assessments so that teachers and pupils can see exactly what to do to improve.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The ICT curriculum has improved to enable all pupils to follow the programme of study in Key Stage 3. All pupils follow an ICT course which allows them to gain accreditation in Key Stage 4. However, one course does not of itself offer the full range of experience expected.
- Schemes of work have been adapted to include scenarios which offer a realistic context, for example, one project links with the school musical production and another builds on pupils' visit to a theme park.
- After evaluating the curriculum at Key Stage 4, the ICT department has adopted what it sees as more appropriate qualifications. Pupils report that they enjoy the new courses, and initial assessments show that they are making more progress than pupils in previous years.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management of ICT are good

- You have a clear vision of how you see ICT contributing to improving the achievement of all pupils at Whitgift School. You have supported the departments head in improving ICT provision.
- The learning environment for ICT has been much improved with good resources and a reliable network. All teachers have personal laptops. 37 classrooms have interactive whiteboards and all staff have received initial training in their use. However staff could do more to use them as genuinely interactive.
- Part of the school's aim to use these resources to improve learning across the school, is the plan to introduce a 'Virtual Learning Environment' this year to offer pupils wider opportunities to find things out, communicate with teachers and each other, and become more independent learners. The potential of the school's video-conferencing camera is not yet exploited, but relocation is expected to match with more generally improved access to ICT across the school.
- The head of the ICT department has been effective in bringing about improvements and raising attainment. The departmental self-evaluation is thorough and honest. It sets the scene for the well-founded planning to increase the range of resources to match individuals' learning needs; use assessment data more consistently; improve the quality of teaching and learning; monitor the effectiveness of new courses and take part in the onscreen test in 2007 for pupils in Year 9.

Inclusion

Inclusivity is satisfactory.

- The ICT department makes rooms and computers available to pupils at the end of the school day, and encourages particular groups to take advantage of extra teacher time. The ICT curriculum is being developed with a careful consideration of the needs of all pupils.
- Although most pupils were making progress in lessons observed, some vulnerable pupils did not have enough attention to help them be fully engaged, and teachers need to ensure that all pupils are supported to take a full part in lessons.
- The school is taking a firm line on managing behaviour and this can mean that some pupils are taught separately. The school does need to ensure that these pupils are able to keep pace in their learning about ICT.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure that pupils do get their full entitlement to ICT, either by broadening what they learn in ICT lessons or elsewhere in their studies

- place the focus of lessons, lesson observations, the assessment system and staff discussion more explicitly to how well all pupils learn
- consider how pair work, group work and pupils' assessment of each others' work might help them articulate understanding and be able to judge the quality of their work independently
- audit current ICT use to inform planning about using ICT to support learning across all subjects and look to build on the strengths of those departments which are confident and successful in their use of ICT
- ensure that all pupils will have access to the network outside the school day, so that they can take advantage of the proposed computer-based learning environment.

The school aims to be part of teaching the New Diplomas in ICT. Enhanced resources, improvements in the capability of pupils, growing interest from staff and expertise from the technology department in particular, all have the potential to contribute usefully to that. The school needs to strengthen its links with external partners within local planning for 14-19 year olds, so that there is an increased knowledge about sector specific opportunities for young people in the area.

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

Linden Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector