Better education and care

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Mr Alan Connor
Head Teacher
Honley High School
Station Road
Honley
Holmfirth
West Yorkshire
HD9 6QJ

Dear Mr Connor

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 1-2 of November 2006 to look at work in information and communication technology (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 staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

The school has suffered for some years with an unreliable network and problems linked to building works. The management team took the brave decision to replace the previous computer system entirely. This inevitably led to increased disruption for a short time but has brought the benefits of reliability and better access. The departmental head has prioritised areas for development, so that currently there are some aspects which are less than satisfactory but which are planned for imminent improvement.

Achievement and standards

Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Reported results for pupils' levels of attainment in ICT at Key Stage 3 are good. There is much very good presentation and graphics work in ICT and in other subjects, for example, technology. There was less evidence of high level work in modelling, control or data analysis.
- Levels of attainment in ICT qualifications in Year 11 are improving and are generally good. However, only a minority of students follow an ICT course at Key Stage 4.
- ICT is supporting learning and improving attainment in other subjects and good progress was observed in classes where pupils with learning difficulties used computers in a variety of ways.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Lessons observed were generally good. They were planned carefully and what was to be learned was shared with the pupils. In one lesson however, pupils did not learn effectively because they did not have sufficient prior experience of the subject.
- Teachers are knowledgeable and confident in their use of ICT. One design technology lesson illustrated well the way that other subjects can improve pupils' ICT capability while using ICT based tools.
- The school shows a clear resolve to include all pupils. Those who find aspects of learning difficult are helped to access subjects and skills through their use of ICT.

Quality of curriculum

Curriculum provision is inadequate

- The ICT curriculum at both key stages has improved but is inadequate for the significant proportion of pupils who do not take a qualification in ICT in Key Stage 4. Although there are some good opportunities for pupils to work with ICT in a number of subjects, the school does not ensure that all pupils cover the statutory programme of study.
- ICT for pupils in Key Stage 3 has improved. To ensure coverage of the programme of study, the department incorporates sample teaching units from the national strategy and is planning to adapt them.
- Much thought has been given to the choice of an appropriate course for Key Stage 4 and the school is beginning to teach a qualification in digital applications to pupils in Year 10. The Year 11 applied GCSE is equivalent to two GCSEs but is taught in less than equivalent time. It is well

supported by good materials and a thoughtful approach to helping students understand the criteria for success.

- Pupils report that they enjoy ICT and take great pride in the high quality of work they have produced. There are some very good examples of creative work.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

- Despite the lack of full coverage of the curriculum in Key Stage 4, the school and the ICT department have demonstrated significant improvements in managing ICT – both as a subject and across the curriculum. The school's own evaluation recognises the helpful contribution of the local authority consultant and accurately identifies the areas which need improvement.
- Substantial resources have been used to make the computer network reliable and available across the school. Staff welcome the good access to electronic whiteboards, and some are use these well to actively involve pupils in manipulating, navigating and practising skills.
- All subjects identify how ICT can be used to enhance learning with graphics, technology and the use of the internet for research being particularly good examples.   Heads of department are keen to take advantage of improved access to ICT to enliven lessons and improve pupils' understanding and achievement.

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

Assessment of ICT is satisfactory

- Systems for assessment at Key Stage 3 and marking and moderating work for examinations in Key Stage 4 are improving. Pupils are given useful checklists and their progress is assessed at the end of each unit of work. Targets are set and summative levels of attainment are recorded.
- Information about aspects of pupils' capability and what they need to do to improve is insufficiently shared between staff and pupils, and from one year of study to the next.
- The school's experience of the pilot of the on-screen test was mixed. Technical problems hindered efficient use of time; schedule testing 'slots' were too short; pupils had had little time to become acquainted with the environment and so were not confident in carrying out tasks. Pupils found the test confusing and frustrating.   In the event only nine pupils completed the test.
- The head of department is planning to improve the experience for pupils: fewer technical problems are expected with the more reliable network;

pupils will spend more time becoming familiar the ICT applications used in the test to transfer skills learnt in other programs; pupils will have more time to practise carrying out tasks in the time limits.

- The departmental head felt there were advantages to the on-screen test environment in that it provided opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT capability, by using a wider variety of applications to carry out tasks.

Inclusion

- ICT is used well to support the learning of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. In lessons observed, these pupils made good progress.
- The school recognises that not all pupils have internet or computer access at home and is working in a variety of ways to ensure that all pupils can gain access to the school's or community provision outside of lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- extend the assessment system to include detail of pupils' capability, specifically which aspects in the programme of study they are confident with and where knowledge, skills and understanding need support to improve
- explore the potential of using peer assessment during lessons, giving pupils the opportunity to share perceptions and articulate their understanding of how well they are achieving
- identify where all pupils will access the ICT programme of study in order to ensure that pupils in Years 10 and 11 are able to receive their entitlement to ICT
- develop a whole-school strategic vision for ICT to improve achievement; shares good practice; exploit the new technologies and ensure teachers benefit from more professional development.

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