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Mr P Strong
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Strong

Ofsted survey inspection programme of secondary schools:
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10-11 December 2007 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 impact on students' achievement 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.

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

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Overall achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Students join the school in Year 7 with broadly average skills in ICT. By the end of Year 9 their standard of attainment is average. This represents satisfactory achievement overall at Key Stage 3. However, the most able students make inadequate progress during this Key Stage and few reach the higher levels. This is because teachers do not provide tasks which are challenging enough for these students.

- Students at Key Stage 4 who choose to study GCSE ICT make satisfactory progress and attain standards broadly in line with the national expectation. They have a good knowledge of communication software and use this effectively to improve the standard of their work in both ICT and other subjects. Not enough is expected of more able students and few attained the highest grades in their GCSE exams in 2007.
- However, whilst students are given opportunities to use ICT in other subjects, these experiences are not monitored rigorously enough. This leads to widely differing experiences and some students' ICT capability is not well developed.
- Students make satisfactory progress in the sixth form and their standards of attainment in ICT are average.
- Students' personal development is good. Students behave very well and work hard. They like working in small groups and share ideas. However, many of the tasks set are highly structured and do not enable students to develop independent learning skills.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching varies from good to barely satisfactory. Each year the team which teaches ICT at Key Stage 3 changes so there is little continuity.
- Specialist teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and use this effectively to challenge students and provide interesting activities. However, non-specialist teachers, whilst having a sound understanding of ICT themselves, do not always understand the pedagogy of ICT and how students learn best when using ICT. As a consequence, students are not always challenged enough and the pace in these lessons is slow.
- Good use is made of interactive white boards. In a science lesson, for example, students were asked to illustrate to others how they had investigated various websites on the topic of whale hunting.
- Relationships are very good and this helps to build students' self-esteem.
- Teachers do not always use the ICT assessment information gathered on students to plan activities that meet the needs of all students.

Quality of the ICT curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate.

- The range of ICT courses at Key Stage 4 is limited and does not meet the needs of all learners. The majority of students in Key Stage 4 do not have ICT lessons and are not receiving their entitlement to the National Curriculum in ICT. The development of students' ICT skills within taught courses is not referenced with the development of the

same skills across the curriculum. This deficiency restricts the development of students' ICT capability.

- The use of ICT within other subjects is inconsistent. Good use is made of ICT in design and technology, science and music in order to improve standards in these subjects. However, in many other subjects, the development of students' ICT capability is dependent on which teacher they have and which option subjects they have chosen.
- There is satisfactory access to computers outside of lesson times. However, the school is in the early stages of developing a virtual learning platform and this restricts students' abilities to carry out research.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- Senior leaders have a clear and coherent vision for the development of ICT. However, this is not shared by all staff and there is no forum for sharing good ICT practice.
- The assistant headteacher with the relatively new responsibility for ICT has a very good strategic overview of ICT and is effectively supporting the ICT coordinator.
- Resources are looked after very well by the technical support staff. There has been significant investment in the ICT infrastructure in recent years.
- The development of ICT across the curriculum is monitored but is not well evaluated for its impact on students' ICT capability. This results in widely varying ICT experiences for students.

Subject issue - the impact of assessment on student achievement in ICT

Assessment in ICT is satisfactory.

- There are satisfactory systems for assessing students' ICT capability. Students are assessed on entry in the first half term of Year 7 and given an ICT level. Their progress is monitored carefully throughout Key Stage 3. Peer assessment is used effectively and students appreciate the informative comments they receive about their work.
- Information is displayed in classrooms which enables students to understand how to improve their ICT work. This is having a positive impact on students' personal development and self-esteem.
- In examination classes, students are given good guidance on how to gain maximum marks for coursework assignments.
- The department is at the early stages of developing student e-portfolios.

Inclusion

The subject's contribution to the inclusion of students is satisfactory.

- All students benefit from opportunities to use the school's computers outside of lesson times to support their work in both ICT and other subjects.
- The learning support department uses ICT effectively to support and motivate students.
- Lesson plans do not always differentiate for different ability groups in the class.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure all students receive their entitlement to the full National Curriculum in ICT
- ensure that the most able students are challenged sufficiently
- develop the virtual learning platform in order to improve students' research skills
- ensure there is a clear and coherent vision for the development of ICT which is shared by all staff
- develop and implement ICT assessment e-portfolios
- improve the whole-school monitoring and evaluation of 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

David Cox
Additional Inspector