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Mrs Beacon
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Beacon

**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 25-26 September 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 student 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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Overall achievement and standards are good.

- Students join the school in Year 7 with average skills in ICT and by the end of Year 11 their standard of attainment is above the national average. This represents good achievement.
- Results in public examinations in ICT have improved significantly in recent years and are now above average. Much of this improvement can be accredited to the work of the ICT co-ordinator who was appointed just over three years ago. Supported by the senior

leadership team, there has been a strong focus on improving standards.

- Students have a good knowledge of relevant software applications. They show a good understanding of how ICT is used in the wider world, particularly of industrial applications.
- The quality of students' work in design and technology is enhanced through the effective use of specialist software. In a sixth form science lesson, students gained a greater understanding of Boyle's gas laws by devising their own investigations using electronic sensors.
- In Year 13, students achieve well in the various ICT courses on offer.
- Students enjoy using computers and have good attitudes to the subject. They happily support one another and enjoy the many additional ICT classes provided by the school.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is good.

- Teachers have a good command of their subject. All are specialist ICT teachers and this has helped to drive up standards.
- Teachers have good relationships with their students which encourages them to work independently.
- Teachers plan their lessons very well. Activities are highly structured and whilst this supports most students, it restricts the creativity of the more able students.
- Assessment procedures are robust and students know how well they are doing in ICT. Students are not always given enough guidance on how to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- There is excellent provision for students who are gifted and talented. Many innovative projects are provided not only for Barclay students but for students from other North Hertfordshire schools. This allows students to develop a strong team spirit and to extend their ICT skills.
- Good use is made of ICT in most subjects particularly in design and technology, science, English and the ASDAN course.
- There is good access to computers outside of lessons. However, students' ICT experiences are not effectively mapped at Key Stage 4 to ensure full coverage of all aspects of the programme of study.

Leadership and management of ICT

The leadership and management of ICT are good.

- Funding from specialist technology college status has been effectively used to improve the ICT infrastructure.
- The ICT co-ordinator, along with the assistant headteacher with responsibility for ICT, provide good leadership which ensures there is a

thoughtful approach to improving ICT provision. New staff are supported well.

- There is a clear vision at all levels of leadership of how ICT will continue to improve and develop. The ICT improvement plan accurately identifies the most appropriate areas for development.
- The departmental self evaluation process is a mixture of formal and informal procedures. A detailed analysis of examination performance in ICT is undertaken and any concerns are quickly addressed.
- Procedures for evaluating other aspects of the department tend to be more informal as are the procedures for monitoring students' ICT experiences across the curriculum.

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

Assessment procedures are good.

- Assessment procedures are extensive and very well structured. Students undertake a formal assessment at the end of their first ICT unit in Year 7. At the end of each subsequent unit, students undertake a formal assessment. This enables teachers to track student achievement and ensure they achieve well.
- There is extensive evidence of students being involved in assessing their own work. They respond well to the positive comments they receive from their teachers.
- The use of e-portfolios is limited, particularly in Key Stage 3. It is recognised that the school is currently investigating proposals for virtual learning platforms that will accommodate this requirement.

Inclusion

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

- Lower attaining students are effectively supported through well planned activities. Students who sometimes struggle with school work, particularly at Key Stage 4, are provided with well designed courses that encourage them to use ICT. These students find using ICT particularly beneficial and this improves their standards in both ICT and other subjects.
- Gifted and talented students have excellent access to ICT facilities both in school time and outside of lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- ensure more effective mapping of the ICT curriculum at Key Stage 4
- adopt a more structured approach to evaluating the work of the ICT department and measuring the impact of ICT provision across the school.

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