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03 December 2007

Mrs B Jenkins
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Jenkins

Ofsted survey inspection programme of secondary schools 2007/8
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 27-28 November 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 nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Overall achievement and standards are good.

- Students join the school with broadly average ICT skills. By the end of Year 11 their standard of attainment is above average. This represents good achievement.
- Students develop a very good knowledge and understanding of how to use software to enhance their presentation skills. They consider specific audience requirements and plan the content of their work

carefully. Students have a good understanding of spreadsheet modelling techniques and work on databases is above average.

- The department correctly identifies that the most able students in Key Stage 3 are not always stretched enough. The department's plans to band students in Year 9 will help provide sufficient opportunities for students to attain the higher levels.
- Prior to 2007, results in ICT examinations had been consistently above average for a number of years. However, in 2007, results in the Diploma in Digital Applications (DiDA) examination were broadly average and students made satisfactory progress. This was because students were taught by non-specialist teachers who failed to ensure all students completed the required coursework to an acceptable standard. Current Year 10 and 11 students are making much better progress and their standards of attainment are back to being above average. This is because they are now taught by specialist ICT teachers. Post 16 results are good. Standards are above average at A-level.
- The development of students' ICT capability across the curriculum is very good. For example, the quality of students' work in French and English is greatly enhanced through the effective use of specialist software.
- Students' personal development is outstanding. The curriculum provides many opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills and different approaches to learning.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning of ICT is good.

- Teachers have a good command of ICT and use this effectively to challenge most students. Activities are normally modified well for lower and middle attaining students. Teachers do not always plan activities that extend the ICT skills of the most able students.
- Students who have learning difficulties are very well supported. The learning support department is successfully using ICT to motivate students who are disaffected.
- Very good use is made of the interactive white boards. High quality professional development has resulted in a significant increase in the appropriate use of this resource.
- Teachers provide plenty of opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills.
- Students' work is monitored effectively. Work is marked well with informative comments. However, students say that they would like to have more regular feedback on their work.
- Across the curriculum, teachers have a very good knowledge of ICT and it is used very effectively to improve standards in their own subjects.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The National Strategy has been modified to suit the needs of most students although not enough is done to support the most able students in all aspects of ICT. All strands of ICT are covered in depth and there is very good coverage of systems and control through the design and technology curriculum.
- At Key Stage 4, most students study the DiDA course. Those students who do not study a discrete ICT course have a fully mapped out programme that meets requirements. Approximately 50 students have after school classes which enable them to study the DiDA course.
- Good use is made of ICT throughout the curriculum. There are many opportunities for students to work creatively, for example within music and English. The innovative use of ICT in French, using podcasts and MP3 players, is leading to improvement, in the students' ICT skills and in their French. Limited access to resources results in some unevenness of how well ICT is used in different subjects.
- The school provides considerable support for local primary schools through its specialist school status. This has enabled students to join the school in Year 7 with a wider range of skills than is normally seen. For example, pupils have an above average understanding of systems and control techniques.
- The virtual learning platform is in the early stages of development. This resource will improve students' ability to carry out research from home using the school's facilities.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are good.

- Leaders at all levels have a clear and coherent vision for the development of ICT. You and other senior leaders have initiated significant improvements in the ICT infrastructure. This has resulted in most ICT equipment being relatively new and staff being well qualified.
- The leader for ICT has a good oversight of ICT developments. Most teachers of ICT are specialists. Whilst staff speak highly of the in-house ICT training they receive, this would be enhanced by providing more formal opportunities for the sharing of innovative practice.
- The ICT systems are robust and are managed effectively by the good technical support staff.
- Department documentation is of a high quality, as is the support for new teachers.
- Last year, leaders did not monitor the delivery of the DiDA course closely enough to ensure good quality provision. However, more rigorous monitoring is now taking place, resulting in a more effectively delivered course.

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

Assessment is good.

- There are good 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 each key stage. 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 very positive impact on students' personal development and self-esteem.
- The department is at the early stages of developing student e-portfolios.

Inclusion

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

- There is very good support for lower attaining students and those students who are disaffected. 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. Students studying the horticulture NVQ course make very good use of ICT to enhance their work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to provide students with more frequent opportunity for formal assessment
- to develop the virtual learning platform further still in order to improve students' research skills
- to provide a more structured forum for sharing innovative ICT practice 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