

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Ms A Garner  
Headteacher  
The Hertfordshire and Essex High School  
Warwick Road  
Bishop's Stortford  
CM23 5NJ

Dear Ms Garner

Ofsted survey inspection programme: Information and communication technology (ICT) and Citizenship

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 29-30 November 2007 to look at work in ICT and citizenship.

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 a number of lessons in both subjects.

#### Information and communication technology

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

#### Achievement and standards

Overall achievement and standards are good.

- Students join the school with above average standards of attainment in ICT. By the end of Year 11 their standard of attainment is well above average. This represents good achievement.
- Students have a good knowledge and understanding of a wide range of software applications. They use communication software very effectively to enhance their work and to deliver high quality case studies. They construct and interrogate databases using complex query routines. They know how to capture data using datalogging equipment.
- At Key Stage 4, all students study short course GCSE and observations would suggest that their standards of attainment in ICT are well above average. Students are very good at designing ICT systems for a specific task.

- The very highest attaining students are not always extended. This is because teachers do not always plan tasks that are demanding enough.
- Post 16 results are exceptionally high and student achievement is outstanding.
- The development of students' ICT capability across the curriculum is very good. For example, in music, students' performances are enhanced through the effective use of specialist subject software.
- Students' personal development throughout is outstanding. Students have excellent attitudes and they develop very good independent learning skills through the use of ICT.

### Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- There are examples of outstanding teaching and learning, particularly at post 16. Teachers have a very strong knowledge of the subject and use this effectively to focus students on how to maximise their marks in coursework.
- Relationships are excellent and this helps to build students' confidence and their ability to work effectively in groups.
- Innovative activities enable students to improve both their ICT skills and standards of attainment within other subjects.
- Students' work is monitored very well and any underachievement is quickly addressed. Marking is regular and provides students with informative comments which enables them to improve their work. This is a very strong feature of the teaching observed at post 16.
- The small number of students with learning difficulties is well supported. Teachers do not always plan activities that challenge the very highest attaining students.
- Across the curriculum, most teachers use ICT very effectively to improve standards within their own subjects. However, this is not yet embedded in all subject areas.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- There have been significant improvements to the curriculum for ICT in the last two years. All students now receive their statutory ICT entitlement.
- At Key Stage 3, well planned schemes of learning provide students with innovative projects. For example, the healthy breakfast project combines elements of ICT, food technology and science.
- At Key Stage 4, all students study the short course GCSE in ICT and those who make particularly good progress have the opportunity to convert to the full GCSE. The current Year 11 cohort is the first group of students to follow a discrete course of study. The school recognises that the curriculum at this key stage needs to be broadened in order to challenge all students.

- Good use is made of ICT throughout the curriculum. In science, students improve their understanding of through the use of ICT to measure and record the velocity of an object. The computer club for girls (CC4G) provides younger students with the opportunity to investigate and use ICT outside of the normal classroom.
- The school website is of a very good quality and students make good use of the different resources available through this facility. The school is developing a virtual learning environment although it is not yet fully functional.

## Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- Exceptional leadership and a strong steer from senior leaders are ensuring that ICT is central to improving standards right across the school. In the last two years there has been considerable investment in the ICT infrastructure and restructuring of the curriculum. Forward thinking leaders are constantly considering how ICT can support students' learning. All staff speak of the massive shift in their understanding of how ICT can be used to drive up standards.
- The relatively new ICT learning manager has an excellent understanding of how ICT needs to develop. There is very good support for new teachers.
- In-house professional development is providing training of the highest quality in areas such as the appropriate use of interactive white boards.
- The ICT systems are robust and staff speak highly of the help they receive from the well qualified ICT technical support staff.
- Whilst ICT is used very effectively in most subjects, the school has identified correctly that ICT is not embedded fully within all subjects and practice is inconsistent.

## Subject issue: the impact of assessment on student achievement in ICT

Assessment is good.

- There are good systems for assessing students' ICT capability. Students' ICT capability is assessed on entry to Year 7 and their progress is monitored carefully throughout each key stage.
- Students are aware of how to improve their work and appreciate the excellent feedback they receive.
- 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 good support for lower attaining students. All students benefit from opportunities to use the school's computers outside lesson times to support their work in both ICT and other subjects.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to develop the virtual learning platform further still to ensure it meets the requirements of the school
- to ensure that the very highest attaining students are challenged sufficiently
- to ensure that ICT is used consistently across the school.

## Citizenship

The overall effectiveness of citizenship was judged to be good.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of how government works and the contribution of voluntary and charitable organisations locally, nationally and internationally. They maturely and sensitively explored issues relating to street violence and the impact on families. Good teaching helped them consider their personal response to issues raised from a spiritual and a cultural perspective.
- Students generally, and in particular those in higher attaining groups, demonstrate very strong skills of enquiry and communication. In debates and discussions, already well-informed students prepared compelling arguments by drawing on research, their personal viewpoints and their background knowledge. They were persuasive in their arguments and subtle and challenging in their questioning. Their oral skills are of a very high order and most are receptive to alternative viewpoints.
- The school has an impressive range of citizenship- related activities many of which are organised in such a way as to provide meaningful learning to a good standard, for example the school election. International links are increasing and opportunities used to good effect. A very long-standing relationship with a school in Uganda acts as a first class vehicle for citizenship education and provides an outstanding focus on participation and responsible action.
- Students' writing is good but only limited consideration has been given to evaluating and monitoring the standard of writing expected in the context of citizenship.

### Quality of teaching and learning of citizenship

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Students engage well in citizenship and readily participate in related activities.

- In much of the teaching, the citizenship element was well considered and sat comfortably with the host subject. Good examples were seen in religious education (RE), English and science. In these subjects, teachers created opportunities and left adequate time to allow students to talk and discuss. In the best examples, students wrestled with the complexities of medical ethics, with the teacher quickly eliciting subjective responses from students and in doing so reflecting how personal views are shaped by many factors.
- Well timed teacher interventions ensured good recapitulation of facts learned earlier but also drew attention to wider topical issues.
- Teachers have appropriate expectations with regard to the skills students need to develop but are less clear about the content of the programme of study.
- Statutory requirements are met for reporting and assessment and the school has made good progress in this respect. Assessment however is insufficiently refined.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is adequate.

- Overall the school has achieved good visibility and distinctiveness for the subject but there is more to do to ensure coherence.
- Citizenship involves a large proportion of the staff and the cross curricular approach works well in most instances, with examples of creative teaching where citizenship expectations blend well with the subject being taught. This is not achieved consistently however and there is a lack of clarity in some subjects and activities about the precise requirements of the citizenship programme of study. Staff with greater knowledge of and more confidence in citizenship education have higher expectations of students.
- A mapping exercise linking citizenship with other subjects provides a good platform for further development of the subject. Approaches to lesson planning are variable. Aspects of the curriculum are nonetheless strong, for example the well considered and topical issues covered by the 'thought for week'.

### Leadership and management of citizenship

Leadership and management are good.

- The senior management team has noted the need for improvements in citizenship education, particularly the monitoring of teaching and learning, assessment, and maximising the benefit of integrated delivery. Actions have been taken to address these issues.
- There is a clear vision from senior managers about the place of citizenship education in the life of the school. This vision is supported by much good teaching and some well considered cross curricular work, particularly in relation to global and international issues. Resources are readily made available to support the subject.

- Managers have recently appointed a new citizenship co-ordinator with a background in related areas. The co-ordinator brings enthusiasm to the work and is objective in his analysis of provision for citizenship.
- Target setting and monitoring are strong in the school and students have an accurate understanding of their own progress. Such target setting is less prominent in citizenship but, based on the self awareness of students and their ability to articulate how they benefit from citizenship related activities, the school is well placed to rapidly improve overall monitoring.
- Capacity for further improvement is good.

Subject issue: teaching and learning about Britain's diversity

- Students enjoy and contribute well to debate about social issues and diversity. A social enterprise programme draws on the work of charities and helps develop research skills and foster an understanding of students own attitudes and values. Diversity, culture and race issues are tackled well in RE, which often uses hard-hitting and realistic case studies. The outstanding links with Uganda, including teacher exchanges, help students consider stereotyping, their assumptions about other peoples and bias in the media. Students have developed a better informed understanding of identity and of how the media shapes perceptions of less well developed nations.

Inclusion

- Teaching methods employed encourage good inclusion. Students are encouraged and generally succeed in developing their personal viewpoints based on informed debate. Attendance is very good and a wide range of relevant enrichment activities linked to charities engage many students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- take steps to ensure greater coherence in the delivery of citizenship education
- increase staff knowledge about citizenship education requirements and, in turn, their confidence in respect of teaching and learning
- further develop monitoring and assessment
- set up systems to share best practice across the school.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ICT and citizenship 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