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Mrs Kearney
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Kearney

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 13–14 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 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 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Overall achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Students join the school in Year 7 with below average skills in ICT. By the end of Year 11 their standard of attainment in ICT is above the national average. This represents outstanding achievement.
- Students have a good knowledge and understanding of modelling techniques. They are adept at producing high quality web sites. The vast majority are very proficient at using the internet. Students' ability to evaluate their work and that of others is well developed and this enables them to develop good independent learning skills. They are

confident and are very eager to do their best. They work exceedingly well together in teams.

- Post-16 students achieve well and attain standards above the national average.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning of ICT is outstanding.

- Specialist ICT teachers have extensive knowledge and understanding of their subject, particularly the requirements of the vocational examination course. The pace of learning is rapid because teachers provide interesting tasks that challenge the vast majority of students. Very good planning provides activities matched to the students' varying prior attainment
- All lessons observed were at least good and many had outstanding features. In one outstanding lesson, the teacher gave Year 10 students a quick demonstration of how to use a new piece of software. Within minutes, students were investigating the features of the software and were using hyperlinks to produce a web site.
- In all the lessons observed students were inquisitive and highly motivated learners. There is a good deal of fun in lessons and both staff and students enjoy working with and learning from one another. Staff and students try out new techniques secure in the knowledge that if something does not work there will be no criticism.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Good use is made of customised National Strategy materials at Key Stage 3. Students enjoy accessing the school's ICT facilities from home. However, the learning platform does not yet allow them to make full use of the school's ICT facilities which restricts their ability to carry out research. This also inhibits some of the innovative projects the school is keen to develop.
- All students follow a discrete programme of ICT that leads to accreditation by the end of Key Stage 4.
- The use of ICT within other subjects is inconsistent. Good use is made of ICT in English, mathematics and science in order to improve standards in these subjects. However, in other subjects, the development of students' ICT capability is dependent on which teacher they have and which option subjects they have chosen.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are good.

- There is a clear, coherent vision for the development of ICT which all staff share. The relatively new director of e-learning has an excellent strategic understanding of how ICT needs to develop within the school. Priorities have been established for ICT and initiatives are being driven forward. This is resulting in rising ICT standards of attainment.
- Excellent technical support is ensuring the ICT infrastructure is robust and supports students' learning. However, the core ICT curriculum leaves little room for other subjects to develop and use ICT. This is restricting the development of students' ICT capability within all subjects.
- The development of ICT across the curriculum is monitored but is not always evaluated for the impact on students' ICT capability. This results in varying ICT experiences for students.

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

Assessment in ICT is outstanding.

- An initial audit of students' ICT skills enables staff to provide more personalised ICT schemes for students. Students are assessed at the end of each lesson and are fully aware of how to improve their work. The school has developed its own innovative electronic tracking system which is proving to be a valuable tool in the mentoring of students. The system provides students with the information needed to plan the next stage of their personalised learning programme.
- Extensive self and peer assessment enables students to become more confident about their abilities. Students are very comfortable about accepting and giving constructive criticism.

Inclusion

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

- Staff work very hard to ensure that all students are provided with exciting ICT opportunities that prepare them well for their future education or employment. Students are helped to plan and improve their work by using ICT. For example, the school is investing heavily in new software to help improve students' ICT skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensure there is a more coherent approach to developing ICT across the whole-school

- develop the virtual learning platform further so that students can use it to improve their research skills.

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