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Mr S Holtam  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Holtam

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 29-30 October 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 quality of the assessment of 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

Achievement and standards in ICT are good.

- Students make good progress to reach standards that are exceptionally high. All are extremely confident and competent users of ICT in a wide range of contexts.
- By the end of Year 9 all students have passed their GCSE in ICT, with close to half gaining grades of A\* or A. Around one quarter of students then go on to study the subject at AS level, with the great majority on course to gain the highest grades.
- Students' personal development is outstanding. Most notable is their high level of independence. Students are invariably polite and respectful. Their behaviour is excellent.

- Students work very hard and particularly enjoy lessons in other subjects where they are able to apply their ICT skills.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is good.

- Teachers are fully aware of the ICT capability of their students and use this effectively to set challenging tasks for them.
- Teachers have an excellent command of the subject and the examination criteria. This allows them to assess work accurately and point out to students exactly what they need to do to improve. However, students say that the quality of feedback they receive can vary between specialist and non-specialist teachers.
- ICT is used widely to make lessons more interesting, but the extent to which students themselves are able to use computers in lessons varies between subjects.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The school provides a good curriculum. The early entry GCSE and AS level courses provide a curriculum that is exceptionally well matched to the needs of these high attaining students.
- Those who do not follow an examination course in Years 10 and 11 generally make good use of ICT in other subjects, so they learn to use their skills in new contexts. However, the quality of ICT provision for individual students varies between, and sometimes within, subjects.
- Students say that they enjoy lessons most when they use ICT to help them learn.

### Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- There has been much improvement in ICT provision in recent years. The subject is well led and managed by a highly knowledgeable head of department. Initiatives are thought through well, and their success is seen in consistently improving achievement and standards.
- Senior managers have an accurate view of the school's provision, although variations in achievement in Years 7 to 9 are not sufficiently investigated because the teaching of non-specialists is not adequately monitored.
- The vision for the future of ICT is good, and balanced with what can realistically be achieved within the constraints of the budget.

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

Assessment in ICT is good.

- The assessment of students' work is accurate and allows teachers to pinpoint exactly where improvements can be made. However, some classes in Years 7 to 9 receive better feedback on their work than others.
- Teachers make good use of the information gained from assessments to plan lessons that build upon students' prior achievements.
- Students' progress is tracked well, both at a subject and whole-school level.

## Inclusion

- The curriculum has been adapted particularly well to meet the needs of high attaining students, and this is supplemented by individual guidance of high quality for any who may start to struggle.
- There are some differences in the progress made by different classes in Years 7 to 9, with some making outstanding progress and others closer to satisfactory.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included the need to:

- investigate the reasons for the difference in progress made by students in Years 7 to 9
- monitor the teaching of non-specialist teachers in Years 7 to 9
- ensure that all students in Years 10 and 11 have a consistently good experience of applying their ICT skills in new contexts.

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 Driscoll  
Additional Inspector