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Dear Mrs Eames

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 6-7 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 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 and observations of lunch time activities.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in ICT are satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form.

- Students enter the school with below average standards in ICT. Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are still below national expectations but this represents satisfactory achievement for most students.
- Students in the sixth form make extensive use of ICT to support their work in a range of subjects. In A level photography, students use digital cameras and photo editing software to a very high standard enabling them to produce excellent results.

- The use of ICT to support work across the curriculum is well developed and in those subjects relating to the specialist visual arts status, such as art and media studies, the use of ICT is exemplary.
- The use of ICT as a tool for learning has helped to raise attainment in the core subjects over the last two years.
- Students throughout the school enjoy using ICT and are well motivated by it. They collaborate well when working with ICT resources and show sensitivity to each other during peer evaluation of their work.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Most lessons in ICT are thoroughly planned and prepared using PowerPoint presentations and interactive whiteboards to provide structure. Planning meets the needs of most learners, though small groups of learners in some lessons are not always sufficiently well engaged with the learning activities.
- Most teachers have adequate subject knowledge of ICT for the learning activities that they need to deliver.
- Work is marked regularly and most students know what their targets are and what they need to do to achieve them.
- Improvements in and access to resources have enabled increasing numbers of teachers across the curriculum areas to start making effective use of ICT to support learning.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Ay Key Stage 3 the national ICT units of work have been amended to provide a robust scheme of work. This is now taught mainly by specialist ICT teachers and the time allocation is generous. Recently, the short course GCSE ICT has been introduced in Year 9. Students' progress on this course is variable, but it should ensure accreditation in ICT for most students.
- At Key Stage 4, a small group of students have opted for the DIDA ICT course but for most students their experiences of ICT are varied and depend on the combination of subjects that they have opted for. This cross-curricular approach to delivering the ICT programme of study needs to be formalised further to provide progression and consistency for all students.
- In the sixth form ICT is a significant element in a number of the courses. Students enjoy ICT and are happy with the level of access to resources, which includes home access to the school network.
- There are some innovative enrichment activities involving ICT, including a lunch time dance club that uses electronic 'dance mats' and music to engage some of the more disaffected girls at the school. In another club students record 'WAV' files to create school radio broadcasts.

Leadership and management of ICT

The leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory.

- There is a shared vision for the use of ICT as a tool for learning across the curriculum and as a means to support the raising attainment agenda, particularly in the core subjects.
- Devolved leadership ensures that renewal and replacement programmes are well managed and access to resources has been improved greatly over the last two years.
- The school information management system works well to identify and set challenging targets for students and to track them to identify signs of underachievement. This enables effective interventions and supports the raising attainment agenda well.
- Self evaluation of ICT is quite thorough. The relative progress of some significant groups of students has been analysed and steps taken to support those doing less well. The progress of other groups such as students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) and those who are gifted and talented is not clear enough. There is also some vagueness about how well students are doing overall in ICT and this stems partly from a lack of clarity about the skills that students are bringing to the school when they start in Year 7.

Subject issue - the impact of assessment on students' achievement in ICT

The impact of assessment on students' achievement is satisfactory.

- Systems for tracking students' progress in ICT have been introduced recently and students say that they are useful in providing them with the information that they need to improve their work further.
- Class tracking sheets provide teachers with an effective method of checking the work rate of students and identifying underachievement or missing work.
- Students are happy with the frequency of marking of their work. This generally happens at the end of units or on a weekly basis. Students are also provided with useful end of unit summary assessment sheets.
- Electronic 'voting pads' have been introduced in mathematics and these provide useful and immediate feedback to students and staff about learning.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is satisfactory.

- The scheme of work for ICT at Key Stage 3 is inclusive and accessible for most students. At Key Stage 4, learning activities in ICT are too variable and dependent on the course options that students make.
- Evaluation of performance data needs to provide a clearer picture about the progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

- The progress of different ethnic groups at the school is monitored in ICT and measures are taken to ensure that these groups achieve equally well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing a more consistent approach to delivering the ICT programme of study at Key Stage 4 so that all students receive a cross-curricular 'scheme of work' ensuring appropriate progression from Key Stage 3
- continuing to improve ICT departmental self-evaluation to provide a clearer picture of the achievements of all students but particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- considering the suitability of the current range of specialist ICT courses for the ability level and aptitudes of the students following them.

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

Ralph Lilley
Additional Inspector