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Dear Mr McCaffrey

Ofsted survey inspection programme – information and communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4-5 February 2008 to look at work in ICT.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the impact of the use of assessment on 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and five joint part lesson observations with members of the senior leadership team.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement and standards in ICT are satisfactory.

- Although standards are high by the end of Key Stage 3 and 4, the progress students make is satisfactory rather than good given their starting points.
- The school has recently improved systems to track and monitor the progress made by students. This has led to better and more accurate analysis of students' performance. However, the school has yet to track

the progress made by different ability groups. This is reducing the school's ability of monitoring closely the progress made by different groups, year on year.

- Changes made to the course students follow at Key Stage 4 is leading to improved rates of progress since September 2007.
- The application of ICT in other subjects is contributing to high standards particularly in design technology, geography, mathematics, physical education and increasingly so in art and the performing arts.
- ICT makes a good contribution to students' personal development and well-being. Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when using technology, for example by not giving away personal details. They also use ICT to learn about health and safety related issues. A good example is students finding out information about the dangers associated with athletes using performance enhancing drugs. ICT is also contributing well to the development of students' future economic well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is satisfactory with pockets of good practice.

- ICT is used effectively as a teaching and learning tool in the majority of subjects.
- Teachers observed using ICT in their lessons demonstrated good subject knowledge. Teaching generally makes particularly good use of interactive whiteboards to introduce the content of lessons, provide demonstrations and consolidate learning.
- ICT is used very effectively by the art department to increase levels of creativity, for example by creating interactive artwork and combining traditional methods of creating art with technology.
- Where teaching and learning are good or better, teachers make effective use of guides and prompt sheets for students; this helps students to progress well in developing their ICT capability. In the more successful lessons objectives are clear and students understand the purpose of the lessons and what is expected of them. Activities build well on students' existing skills and knowledge.
- Where teaching and learning are less effective, this is because lessons are too teacher-directed, limiting opportunities for students to work independently, or for them to contribute to lessons. Data about students has not been taken sufficiently into account in the planning of some of these lessons. Furthermore, assessment to support learning is not sufficiently well embedded, resulting in slower rates of progress for some students and limited challenge for the most able.
- Students appreciate learning through the use of ICT because they can work at their own pace and they enjoy the interactive nature of working with a computer.
- They make good use of ICT to produce course work which is of high quality and is well presented.

- ICT contributes significantly to students' enjoyment of learning and their levels of motivation; those spoken to during this visit stated that it is their preferred way of learning and working.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. The school is currently undertaking a review of the curriculum and this includes the development of vocational courses.

- The current organisation of the provision at Key Stage 3 builds satisfactorily on the high levels of ICT many students bring with them from primary school.
- In Years 7 and 8 ICT is currently taught in rotation with other subjects which, although equates to two lessons of ICT per week for half an academic year, does not provide sufficient continuity for students.
- The curriculum for Year 9 has already been improved. This has been achieved by teaching the generic skills required for students to use a broad range of software packages and by focussing on themes, audience, purpose as well as presentation. This has also led to a more creative use of ICT and a more relevant curriculum.
- ICT is an integral part of the work of all departments; it has also facilitated a closer working relationship between departments.

Leadership and management of ICT

The quality of leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory and have improved in the last few months. The new head of department is due to take up his post in the coming weeks.

- Members of the senior leadership team have worked well together to secure improvements needed, particularly in helping to improve the curriculum at Key Stage 4 as well as developing more effective ICT based management systems within the department.
- The school has not undertaken a recent survey of staff training needs for ICT. However, some heads of department in the school have taken the initiative of providing high quality training to the staff in their departments.
- The school has recently gone live with its virtual learning environment and recognises the value of adding further information which students and parents can access from home.
- Good use is made of ICT as an administrative and management tool.

Impact of the use of assessment on ICT

Impact of the use of assessment on ICT is satisfactory.

- Target setting has become more realistic and appropriately challenging as a result of improved assessment procedures.
- The sports studies department uses technology very well to help students view, evaluate and improve their performance.

- The use of teacher and peer assessment during lessons is developing but has yet to become firmly embedded.
- Teachers make good use of 'two stars and a wish' when marking work at the end of a unit. However students would welcome more oral feedback during lessons about how well they are doing.
- Students are not all sufficiently familiar with their targets and levels.
- The school has yet to share information about students' ICT capability more widely between departments, including information about the software students are familiar with.

Inclusion

The impact of ICT on promoting inclusion is good.

- The use of ICT as a learning tool significantly improves the ability of those students with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) to access the curriculum. This is leading to accelerated rates of progress for some students as well as improved levels of self-esteem and confidence.
- Excellent examples are evident in the sport department with students with disabilities making good progress for example on the course entitled 'Living Sport'.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing rates of progress made by students in Years 7 and 8 by improving the continuity of the ICT provision
- ensuring teachers make consistently good use of assessment data to inform planning and teaching which is of appropriate challenge to students differing starting points
- sharing information about students' ICT capability more widely between departments.

We also discussed the value of the school re-introducing a focus on ICT within transition initiatives between Years 6 and 7.

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. A copy of the letter will also be sent to the diocesan board. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector