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Mr G Lonergan
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Dear Mr Lonergan

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 06 - 07 March 2008 to look at work in information and communication technology (ICT).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of assessment.

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 observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in ICT

- Students overall enter the school with below average ICT skills. School data shows that standards are rising this year at each key stage as a result of improvements to track students' progress and the support they receive to show them how to improve. Good progress leads to average standards in the B'Tec ICT qualification taken by all students at the end of Key Stage 4.
- Students in the sixth form take an applied ICT GCE course and achieve well, with around half of the group gaining A and B grades. A fall last year has been corrected swiftly with results set to return to previous levels.

- Students are confident and independent ICT users. Because of thorough teaching of ICT skills they make effective and growing use of ICT across the curriculum to research, present and analyse information. A particular strength is the use of ICT in music and multimedia at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- Students concentrate well in their ICT lessons. Their behaviour is exemplary and they are keen to learn. Where appropriate, they collaborate well and are keen to share their knowledge. They have a good understanding about safe internet use.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable. They provide students with motivating lessons that catch their interest because the application of ICT is relevant to the students' lives.
- Good opportunities are made to allow students to develop skills, research information and select the best way to present it. Practical tasks are explained clearly they are given individual support that leads to brisk progress.
- A rigorous assessment system is displayed on the school's network. It provides students with information about their targets and progress. All students have a digital portfolio which they use to store work from across the curriculum. For students taking examinations links to the syllabus and grade criteria means they have very good support to know what they should do to improve. This has a positive impact on their progress.
- Teachers across the school make increasing use of computer white boards to present information in lessons and plan opportunities for students to use ICT to enhance learning. This is, however, inconsistent between subjects and the tracking of students' use of ICT across the curriculum is not yet securely in place.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- At Key Stages 3 and 4 all students follow a carefully structured and assessed discrete programme that meets National Curriculum requirements. It gives students a good basis to apply their skills across the curriculum as subject departments increasingly integrate ICT fully in lessons.
- Sixth form students take applied ICT qualifications or use ICT independently. They enjoy an ICT enabled 'learning lounge' for independent work and specialist hardware/software in their subjects.
- The ICT department is leading the way in providing students with access to learning at school and home. Learning resources, subject guidance and assessment information are made easily accessible.

Leadership and management of ICT

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- You and your senior leaders work closely with the ICT manager to provide a strong innovative and inclusive vision of e-learning.
- ICT is regarded as a key driver to improve the quality of teaching and learning to standards. Recent work, for example, to implement a rigorous assessment and target setting system shows the immediate impact of this on improving students' progress.
- An excellent programme of staff training and development has resulted in staff enthusiastic to use ICT to enrich learning. Teachers use the school network extremely well for communication, assessment and students' pastoral support. Plans are well advanced to implement an integrated curriculum using an ICT learning platform.
- The school's specialist arts and humanities status has enabled extensive ICT investment. Improved computer suites, wireless 'hot spots' and specialist facilities, for example, in music and media production, lead to excellent curriculum enhancement.

Impact of ICT on use of assessment

Assessment in ICT is good.

- A particular strength is that assessment in ICT mirrors the system across the school. Students are assessed when they start school using carefully structured projects to determine their skills. The outcomes are used to put students in ability bands and to set those targets. Each piece of work is assessed and students' ICT skills and progress recorded. This is made available to students, teachers and parents, online and by interim progress reports and meetings with parents. Students are clear about the level at which they are working and what they must do to improve their work.

Inclusion

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

- Thorough curriculum planning, regular lessons and very good liaison between staff make certain that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported fully in lessons. Excellent specialist hardware and software, for instance, supporting visually impaired pupils, is a particular strength. Access to computers out of lessons and after school is available to students, including an opportunity within the ICT department to attend a Saturday study day. Students can loan equipment and they are given pen drives to help transfer work between home and school. Plans are in hand to provide all Year 7 pupils with their own laptop from September 2008.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- strengthening the planning and tracking of students' use of ICT across the curriculum.

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

Michael Haynes
Additional Inspector