20 March 2008

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Dear Mr Marks

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 - 19 March 2008 to look at work in 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 seven lessons and evaluation of the school's virtual learning environment.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement and standards are good overall.

- At Key Stage 3 students make satisfactory progress and reach average standards. However, the number of more able students achieving higher standards is less than it should be because they are not set sufficiently challenging targets. About one third of students at Key Stage 4 take an optional course and their achievement is regularly assessed to make sure they reach challenging targets. This shows that they make good progress and standards are above average. A small number of students in the sixth form take A and AS examinations.

School data and samples of their work shows they are achieving their targets.

- Results are expected to improve in 2008 over previous years when they have sometimes been lower than expected, particularly for more able students. This is because rigorous actions this year addresses any underachievement and makes sure that all students are on course to meet their targets. Students' use of ICT in other subjects is not assessed or evaluated.
- Consistently good teaching gives students the skills to become independent and confident using ICT to enrich learning across the curriculum to research, present and analyse information.
- Students' attitude and approach to learning is good. They concentrate very well, are enthusiastic and relish opportunities to use ICT. Students work together well, behaviour is good and they understand the need for safe practice when using the internet.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers provide students with motivating lessons that hold their interest and give them good opportunities to acquire and develop new skills. They are enthusiastic and have very good knowledge which is used well to challenge and extend students' learning. A good feature is the school's virtual learning environment (VLE) that makes sure students know exactly what they need to learn, how to find resources, support material and activities to extend their learning after their lessons. This leads to consistent teaching approaches and contributes much to students' good progress.
- In Year 7 an outstanding feature is piloting this year of an e-book assessment profile for each student. It provides students with information about their targets and progress based on peer and teacher assessment. All students store their ICT work in an e-portfolio. For older students taking qualifications this links very well to course work requirements and means they have a clear understanding of their targets and what they must do to achieve them.
- Teachers throughout the school are embracing enthusiastically the use of the school's VLE and growing provision of computer white boards to present information in lessons and enhance learning. Much is new this year, but the excellent example set by the ICT faculty and VLE manager means that its use already has a very positive impact on teaching and learning. Good use of specialist ICT in, for example, science, music, mathematics, design technology, geography and many other subjects complements students' ICT lessons and has a demonstrable impact on their learning and standards.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is satisfactory because whilst there is good ICT provision for most students, in Year 11 for two thirds of them not taking an ICT qualification nothing is in place to develop their capability. This means provision is short in meeting national curriculum requirements to provide a planned and assessed programme of study for all students.
- At Key Stage 3 a lively topic based programme meets National Curriculum ICT requirements and links to students' e-book assessment and target tracking. IT is provided through the VLE and supports learning at home and school.
- Most subjects plan for students to use ICT to enhance their learning. However, this is not evaluated or matched to the ICT curriculum and the students' achievement is not assessed.

Leadership and management of ICT

The quality of leadership and management is good.

- Strategic management of ICT is a strength because the school's senior leaders work closely together to drive forward improvements. The pace of change has been rapid and great strides made recently to achieve their inclusive vision of e-learning for all students.
- ICT leaders are very clear about what they want to do and how much they have done to achieve it. In developing the provision of hardware and using the ICT faculty to pilot innovative online teaching and assessment they make sure developments work before implementing them across the school. This is a key to the school's success, for instance, to use the VLE, and indicates the determination to get things right so that there is a measurable impact on learning.
- Thorough training and development means teachers are enthusiastic in using ICT to enrich learning. Plans are well advanced to record students' achievements and targets using the VLE, implement a students' 'learn to learn' programme and initiate video conferencing with feeder primary schools. These examples show well the school's commitment to continue ICT development to enrich learning and help students achieve higher standards.
- Recently the school has invested much of the money it receives for its specialist status to improve and extend the use of ICT. Provision of computer whiteboards, computer suites in many classrooms and online learning materials is having a major impact on teaching, improving the quality of learning and transforming the way that lessons are presented.

Use of Assessment

Assessment in ICT is satisfactory

- Plans are in hand to develop assessment and tracking of students' work using the outstanding Year 7 pilot e-book assessment as a model for the whole school. However, there is no initial assessment of their capability when they join the school. At Key Stage 3 and for students

taking optional courses at Key Stage 4, their work is assessed using the National Curriculum or examination criteria to set them targets three times a year. Regular feedback in lessons makes sure students know how to improve their work.

- Other than for students taking optional ICT courses, achievement is not assessed at Key Stage 4, and the school does not know how well students use their skills across the curriculum.
- Most students are set ICT targets, but at Key Stage 3 students do not always know what they mean and those for more able students lack challenge. At Key Stage 4 targets are based on students' performance in another core subject for current Year 11, However, current Year 10 do have targets based on GCSE, ICT (FFTd). This means they give levels students should reach but take too little account of their ICT capability. Teachers, however, identify students who need extra help to achieve their targets.
- There is an insufficiently clear view of overall performance across the faculty, each student's year on year progress and on the short term monitoring of their progress at Key Stage 4.

Inclusion

- Provision of the VLE means students access learning materials in school and at home. Teachers report that almost all students have computers at home, and for those that do not, or prefer to work in school, good provision is made for them to use computers before and after the school day.
- Provision to support students with learning difficulties and disabilities is good. They make good progress and often achieve higher standards than similar students do nationally.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve the monitoring and tracking of all students' achievement
- make sure that students, particularly the more able, have challenging targets
- audit the use of ICT in other subjects to ensure coverage of the national curriculum programme of study.

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