08 March 2008

Mr S Goddard
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Dear Mr Goddard

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3–4 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 five lessons and other ICT related activities.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards in ICT are below average at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, although there is a gradually improving picture.
- The proportion of students reaching Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 3 has increased from 53% to 74% over the last five years and is now broadly average. However, very few students reach Level 6.
- Whilst GCSE results have improved over the last three years, the proportions of students obtaining A* to C in both the full and the short

courses has been significantly below the national average and very few students obtain a grade A.

- In contrast, the first group of students to take a GNVQ in ICT and those pursuing the functional skills course have reached significantly higher standards.
- Given the improving picture and the larger proportion of students now taking and making better progress on the functional skills course, students' achievement is judged to be satisfactory. The achievement of students taking the GCSE short course, however, remains unsatisfactory, as does the achievement of more able students at Key Stage 3.
- Many students have positive attitudes towards ICT. For example, those following the recently introduced skills courses see the relevance of what they are learning and work enthusiastically. Others, such as those observed in the media suite at lunchtime, enjoy using ICT for composition, recording of music and video editing.
- Students greatly appreciate being able to access their work saved on the school's network from home and the ease with which they can transfer their assignments into teachers' virtual 'pigeon holes'.
- Students in Key Stage 4 following the one-period-a-week short course show considerably less enthusiasm for ICT, even though they may use ICT willingly for specific assignments in other subjects.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is satisfactory.

- The staff observed during the visit related well to the students and managed their classes effectively. In most of the lessons, teachers structured their lessons well and maintained a good pace.
- Discussions with students and scrutiny of their work indicate that much of the teaching is fairly prescriptive and that there is little differentiation of teaching input for different groups of pupils within lessons. There are insufficient opportunities for students to develop their independence and initiative within ICT.
- Opportunities were provided in most of the lessons observed for students to reflect on their work, but their ability to analyse and identify areas for improvement was weak and teachers did not do enough to help students develop this ability.
- Many of the tasks observed in lessons and in looking at students' completed work indicate that good opportunities have been provided for pupils to develop and practise skills within ICT, but that there appears to be little liaison with other departments to identify contexts for practising these skills which would contribute to students' learning in other subjects.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory, but is improving.

- The new functional skills course, which is now being started in Year 9, is much more relevant to students' needs and provides greater motivation than the previously offered full GCSE course. The involvement of the music department in teaching part of this course to students in Year 9 has contributed additional expertise and has been well received by students.
- The short-course GCSE followed by students who do not opt for ICT in Years 10 and 11 provides entitlement but does not engage the students sufficiently.
- The significant improvement in the school's resources over the last few years and the ease with which students can access their work from any part of the school and from home have led to a significant increase in the use of ICT by both staff and students. As a result, ICT has become a much more integral part of learning throughout the school.

Leadership and management of ICT

The leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory.

- The last few years have seen a gradual improvement in the school's exam results, but the leadership has not done enough to pinpoint why the school's ICT results are still lower than those in most other subjects.
- The ICT development plan has rightly identified the need to raise the attainment of more able pupils and to develop and embed assessment and tracking procedures. There is still further work to be done in these areas.
- Impetus as a result of the school's art specialism and the strong focus on ICT provided by yourself have contributed significantly to improving the school's infra-structure for ICT, the level of resources and staff's expertise in the use of ICT. This has resulted in staff adopting a much more positive approach to ICT and a greater willingness to use ICT within their teaching.
- The senior staff interviewed during the visit were all keen to promote the use of ICT and gave many examples of how ICT has improved the quality of teaching and the motivation of students within their departments.
- The network services manager and his assistants have played a crucial role in establishing an easy-to-use system which allows excellent access for staff and students.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is satisfactory.

- Although broadly satisfactory, the use of assessment remains an area for further development as recognised in the subject's development plan.
- Although there is a transition project which provides some information on students' attainment on entry to the school, there is currently no detailed baseline assessment. This makes it hard to determine students' progress in Years 7 and 8 and for staff to ensure that work is being set at an appropriate level for more able students.
- Assessment procedures are built into the new courses now running in Years 9, 10 and 11. Clearly stated criteria help students to know what they

need to do in order to achieve a pass, merit or distinction, and regular assessment opportunities provide clear indications of students' attainment.

- Most teachers build into their lessons an opportunity for students to assess the progress they have made in the lesson or to evaluate their work. As yet, however, students are not skilled in analysing their own work or that of their peers. The development of these skills is likely to be a crucial factor in improving students' achievement, particularly that of the more able pupils, where higher grades depend on their ability to improve their work in the light of their own analysis and evaluation.

## Inclusion

- The school has sought to ensure that all students receive their entitlement to ICT through scheduled lessons in Years 7 to 9 and, for those not opting for ICT in Years 10 and 11, through a short-course GCSE. Whilst the latter provides entitlement for all students, their motivation is not high and results have been poor.
- The improvements in resources and the ease with which students can access their files and a wide variety of programs from any computer in the school and from home have been the most important factors in ensuring that all students have equal access to ICT.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the attainment and achievement of more able students
- developing more effective systems for assessment and students' ability to assess and evaluate their own work
- ensuring that the teaching provides more opportunities for students to exercise their independence and initiative within ICT
- ensuring that ICT skills are developed within a context which has relevance to students' work in other subjects.

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


Graham Sims
Additional Inspector