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Mrs E Hilton
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Dear Mrs Hilton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 27-28 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement and standards are good overall.

- Most students begin in Year 7 with below average ICT skills. Students make good progress and at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 standards are broadly average and rising. Current developments to track student's progress and show them how to improve their work is having a positive effect. School data indicates that overall results are predicted to improve this year at each stage, although the number of more able students likely to achieve high standards is less than it should be.

- Students enjoy using ICT. They develop good basic skills, are confident and independent in their choice of software when given the opportunity. They have excellent attitudes and take pride in presenting their work, for instance at Key Stage 4 in e-portfolios or information booklets created at Key Stage 3, to a 'professional' standard in science, ICT and history.
- In lessons, students are keen to learn. They concentrate well, are keen to collaborate with their peers and share their expertise. Behaviour is exemplary and 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 have good subject knowledge. They are keen to engage students in practical activities which are intended to make them think for themselves. This leads to good and sometimes outstanding teaching with lessons that hold students' interest because topics are lively, relevant and challenging. Progress is brisk because tasks are explained clearly and students given the individual support they need.
- Lessons are planned thoroughly. Students are consulted about their learning so that teachers can modify lesson content to make sure it meets their needs. At each Key Stage students self-evaluate their work to judge their progress and where they take a qualification, to make sure they cover all aspects of the syllabus.
- Throughout the school, teachers make effective use of computer white boards to present lessons and enhance learning. Students make good use of ICT in most subjects to develop their knowledge, research, analyse and present information. Provision is, however, inconsistent across subjects and the tracking of students' use of ICT across the curriculum is not yet in place

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- At Key Stages 3 and 4 all students have timetabled and assessed ICT lessons that meet National Curriculum requirements. These are taught by subject specialists and are the result of good departmental self-evaluation and planning to put in place a curriculum which meets all students' learning needs.
- At Key Stage 3 a topic based approach gives students a good grounding in basic ICT skills which they apply in other subjects. The school's self-evaluation indicated provision at Key Stage 4 was not meeting all students' needs. This year a new course in Year 10 is proving more motivating and relevant to students and replaces the previous qualification. Early indications show that this is having a very positive impact in raising standards and improving students' progress.
- The school's specialist language college status has improved ICT provision with a class ICT suite. The languages department was the

first to fully adopt computer whiteboards and show how they could enhance learning.

Leadership and management of ICT

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- Outstanding leadership results from a strong shared vision to develop the subject from you, your senior leadership team, ICT strategy director and head of department.
- Driven by an excellent ICT strategy plan improvement to the provision is consistent and forward thinking. Strong and accurate self-evaluation coupled with a determination to make sure ICT is integrated into all aspects of the school's work is successfully and rapidly driving forward improvements in provision and standards.
- Staff are aware that there is more to do, for example, the use of a virtual learning environment is at an early stage as is the development of a comprehensive whole school target tracking and assessment system. However, a good programme of staff training and support, coupled with new hardware has resulted in staff across the school that are highly enthusiastic in their desire to push forward use of ICT.

Use of Assessment

Assessment in ICT is satisfactory

- ICT teachers regularly mark and grade students' work and record their progress and targets using departmental spreadsheets. In lessons they give students good feedback about the quality of their work. Assessment links well to National Curriculum and examination criteria, but recording is independent of the school-wide system. The school system records predicted and final ICT results only, whilst in other core subjects, assessments are recorded in more detail and are consequently of more use to track progress.
- Target setting and assessment at Key Stage 4 (including Year 9 to Year 11) is stronger than at Key Stage 3. This is because teachers and students make consistently good use of examination criteria to identify what is needed to improve work.
- At Key Stage 3 this year the school has piloted a very useful baseline assessment in Year 7. However, its use to ensure students' targets link to teachers' assessment of their current work is not as strong as it should be. Students make effective use of good quality self-assessment booklets to identify their level of work. However, outcomes to inform their targets are not always recorded and targets, particularly for more able students lack challenge.
- Other than in ICT lessons students' use of ICT is not assessed, which means that the school does not know how well they apply their skills across the curriculum.

Inclusion

- Thorough curriculum planning, regular lessons and good liaison between staff make certain that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported fully in lessons.
- The school's information shows most students have access to ICT out of school, and it has put in place good arrangements to make sure those that do not are not disadvantaged.

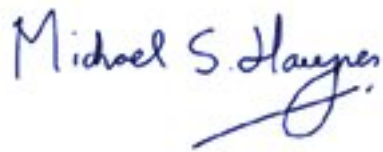
Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- setting challenging targets for more able students
- improving the consistency of assessment systems to track students' progress in ICT and 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

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael S. Haynes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Michael Haynes
Additional Inspector