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Mrs K Taylor
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Taylor

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Information communication and technology

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 9 - 10 June 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 discussions with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and two joint lesson observations.

During the visit, you informed me of how hard the school has worked since May 2007 to overcome the difficulties the school had previously experienced. As a result, the school now has suitable hardware and software as well as a reliable network system.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement and standards in ICT are satisfactory and improving.

- Students arrive at Sir John Colfox with a broad range of abilities in ICT. However, the school does not have sufficient information about students' individual levels in ICT when they arrive in Year 7. As a result, the progress made in Year 7, particularly by some of the higher attaining students, is limited. The rate of progress improves in Year 8 and by the end of Key Stage 3, standards are above average, with

increasing numbers of students gaining Level 6 on the National Curriculum.

- Students make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 4 and standards are broadly in line with national averages and are rising more rapidly this year than they have done in the past. This is because there is now a better understanding amongst staff about how they can prepare students for examination. The school has correctly identified the need to provide different levels of support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities to ensure these students all achieve as well as their peers.
- The school's own information as well as published data indicates that standards in ICT in the sixth form are above average.
- The extent to which ICT is being used to raise standards across the curriculum is very variable including within departments. Where ICT is being used most effectively, for example in physical education, mathematics, music, modern foreign languages and geography, it is used interactively by students and their teachers and is contributing to raising standards.
- Students' enjoyment of ICT is satisfactory and the subject makes an effective contribution to their personal development and well-being.
- Students demonstrate an adequate understating of how to keep themselves safe when using technology.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning of ICT is satisfactory.

- Those who teach ICT demonstrate good subject knowledge, but do not always take sufficient account of the different ways in which students learn.
- Although teaching provides increasing levels of challenge for higher attaining students, there is not always equally good support or guidance for pupils with learning difficulties and or disabilities.
- Teaching makes satisfactory use of ICT to demonstrate new concepts and clarify the intended outcomes of lessons.
- Students are quick to learn new skills and capabilities; they would welcome more opportunities to explore unfamiliar applications.
- Some younger students say it would be helpful if they were taught to type when they arrive at the school in Year 7. They believe that poor typing skills can slow down the pace at which they are able to work.
- Students use ICT to collect and analyse data as well as to produce charts and graphs. They design their own web pages, undertake searches on the internet and produce multi-media presentations.
- There are too few opportunities for students to make choices or for them to use digital cameras and camcorders; furthermore, their ability to use word processing packages to manipulate text, edit, and improve written work is at a basic level.
- Students with learning difficulties and disabilities, especially those who experience difficulty with reading and writing, benefit from using laptops in lessons.

- In some ICT lessons, there are missed opportunities for students to develop their thinking skills, or for them to work creatively and collaboratively.
- Where lessons include the use of data projectors and whiteboard technology, students would like these to be used more interactively.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum for ICT is satisfactory.

- The curriculum covers the programmes of study and promotes adequate levels of progression from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4.
- Students receive their statutory entitlement of ICT in all key stages; this leads to opportunities to get a qualification at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 has been revised to make it more engaging and varied for students. This has led to adequate improvements in curriculum provision, although the school recognises it still has some way to go to ensure the curriculum fully meets the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- The application of ICT across the curriculum is developing well, but has yet to be firmly embedded in all subjects.
- Students would welcome more opportunities to make choices about how they use ICT and which software packages best suit their needs. They would like access to a broader range of hard ware and software applications including the use of handheld technology.
- Some students would particularly welcome more use of ICT in English.
- ICT has a satisfactory and improving impact on the school's status as a specialist language college.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory.

- Since gaining control of ICT provision in May 2007, the school has successfully upgraded and networked its ICT systems to ensure that ICT is now fit for purpose.
- The senior leadership of the school provides effective support to the ICT department. This has led to improvements in the school's hardware and ICT infrastructure, and has helped to accelerate the rate of progress in ICT in the last 12 months.
- The department is well led and managed and the school has an accurate view of its strengths and areas in need of improvement.
- Continued professional development has helped to improve the confidence and competence of most staff in their ability to use ICT.
- Action and improvement plans for ICT include an appropriate focus on learners; however, there is not a strong enough emphasis on how teaching in ICT makes an impact on learning.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment in the subject is satisfactory.

- The school has improved the way it tracks and monitors students' progress in ICT. This enables the department to identify more readily those students at risk of underachieving. However, the data collected is not always used as well as it could be to set and review challenging targets.
- Although there is guidance for students about how to reach the next level in learning, too many students are unaware of the level at which they are working.
- The use of peer assessment is developing and improving well. This provides students with good opportunities to review and evaluate their work. Students would appreciate more written feedback from their teachers about how well they are doing and how to improve during a unit of work.
- The mathematics department makes effective use of ICT to support assessment procedures. Opportunities to receive instant feedback from some of the mathematics programmes has proved very effective in helping to accelerate the rate of learning, especially for higher attaining students at Key Stage 3.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing students' enjoyment of learning ICT by: diversifying the range of hardware and software they use; ensuring learning is always put into a meaningful and purposeful context and by ensuring that teaching takes good account of the different ways students learn
- embedding the application of ICT across the curriculum
- improving progression in skills and capabilities between years 6 and 7 by developing transition arrangements between the school and local primaries and junior schools
- ensuring the leadership and management of ICT are more sharply focused on how teaching impacts on learning and the progress made by different groups.

We also discussed the school's ambitions for developing a virtual learning environment (VLE) which the school hopes to use to further improve the level of students' engagement and encourage parents to become more involved in their children's learning and progress.

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 local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector