

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr O Davies  
Headteacher  
Warblington School  
Southleigh Road  
Havant  
Hampshire  
PO9 2RR

Dear Mr Davies

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Information and communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18-19 November 2008 to look at work in ICT.

As outlined in the 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and joint observation of eight part lessons, which included the school's accelerating reading programme.

You, as headteacher have been in post since January 2008 and your deputy headteacher since April 2008. Over the last couple of years, the school has undergone some turbulent times with changes in staff in the ICT department.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is satisfactory overall; standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly average but below average by the end of Key Stage 4.

- Attainment in ICT on entry to the school is lower than expected.
- Students make satisfactory progress by the end of Key Stage 3.
- Recent assessments and test results show that standards in ICT at the end of Key Stage 4 are improving from having been significantly below

average. However, standards, including functional skills, remain too low and are not improving quickly enough.

- The school has correctly identified the need to provide more challenge for the more able students as too few attain the higher levels at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Girls and boys achieve equally well at Key Stage 3, but as is the case nationally girls out perform boys at Key Stage 4.
- The extent to which ICT is widely used across the curriculum is good. This is contributing to the progress students make in developing ICT skills with increasing levels of independence. Students' use of ICT across the curriculum is also contributing to a rise in standards in a broad range of subjects. This is particularly evident at Key Stage 3 and notably in English, mathematics, science and in modern foreign languages. Students believe that when they use ICT, it enables them improve the quality and content of their work in other subjects. Those who usually demonstrate low levels of confidence talk with pride about the work they have produced using the computer.
- Pupils make good use of ICT at Key Stage 4 to help them to redraft and improve their course work.
- The school has an effective policy, which helps students to use technology safely and enables them to gain support and helpful guidance when needed.
- The school makes particularly good of an ICT based programme to accelerate students' progress in learning to read. This has been very effective in raising the standard of reading for those who arrive at the school with low levels of literacy.

### Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning of ICT is inadequate.

- Although the teaching of ICT as a subject is weak, the quality of teaching in other subjects, observed during the visit, which made use of ICT, was good. This is contributing to the overall progress learners make in developing ICT skills and capabilities.
- Teaching across the curriculum makes effective use of ICT to provide a personalised approach to learning, accelerating the rate of progress during lessons.
- In a particularly good mathematics lesson for lower ability students in Year 11, students made very effective use of ICT to reinforce their understanding of fractions, percentages and decimals. The teacher made good use of ICT to motivate students to want to learn by helping them to see patterns and relationships between numbers. As a result, they were quickly able to make accurate predictions about results and felt very positive about the progress they were making.
- Staff who use ICT in other subjects report that ICT has helped to transform their teaching. This is helping to make learning more interactive and at times brings learning to life for example in modern foreign languages and in history. In these subjects, students use ICT to find out about the outside world and past times.
- However, ICT does not automatically motivate students to want to learn. In the weaker ICT lessons, students rapidly lost interest in their

work because they were not clear about the purpose of the lesson and learning was not presented within a meaningful context. Where ICT lessons were inadequate, they were not well structured and work was not sufficiently well matched to the needs or interests of all students. Learning in these lessons lacked pace and challenge and teaching did not take sufficient account of the broad range of approaches advocated by the Secondary National Strategy. As a result, students did not make the progress of which they were capable.

- The value that teaching assistants add to ICT lessons, was adversely affected by weak teaching and insufficient guidance.

## Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum for ICT is inadequate.

- There is some good work taking place beyond the ICT department that is enriching and supporting ICT provision overall. This includes the work with other schools in the federation to increase the ICT offer. The ICT curriculum is enhanced by the science and mathematics department as a result of the school's specialist status.
- However, the discrete ICT curriculum does not cover all the programme of work sufficiently well at Key Stage 4 and the department does not ensure that all students in this key stage receive their full ICT entitlement.
- The department has recognised that the Key Stage 3 programme of work does not challenge students sufficiently and this is currently under review to improve the planning and content of work so that it is more suitable for the needs and interests of all learners.
- Students have access to a satisfactory range of ICT equipment, but there is little use of hand held technology.
- The unit of work about game authoring provides a good opportunity for students to learn about control and programming in a way that is engaging and motivating.
- The ICT curriculum does not ensure that all students make use of data logging to measure, record and analyse physical variables.
- Although there are good links between ICT and other subjects in lessons that are not discrete ICT lessons, the reverse is not true. The school does not currently map the links between ICT and other subjects to monitor the extent and balance of ICT provision.
- Students enjoy the use of ICT more when it is used across the curriculum than when it is taught in discrete ICT lessons.

## Leadership and management of ICT

The quality of leadership and management within the ICT department is inadequate.

- The role of the ICT subject leader is under developed. As a result, students do not all receive their National Curriculum entitlement for ICT; there are significant weaknesses in the teaching of the subject and standards are not rising quickly enough.

- You are already aware of the shortcomings within the ICT department and as a result, the newly appointed deputy headteacher has recently taken responsibility for overseeing the line management of this part of the school.
- The deputy headteacher is providing good strategic leadership at a senior level and has undertaken an evaluation of ICT. This has enabled senior leaders to gain a more accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the department.
- There is a good vision for ICT, which has been shared and agreed with staff and governors; however, the vision has yet to be fully embraced by all staff.
- There is effective technical support and this has encouraged many staff to be creative and take risks in their use of ICT in other subjects.
- You have taken a leading role in ensuring the school has hardware and software that is fit for purpose and that it sufficiently fulfils the needs of learners in accessing ICT across the curriculum.
- Although subject leaders have ICT included within their remit this does not include evaluating the impact of ICT in helping to raise standards in their area of responsibility.
- Staff have benefited from ICT training provided by the school, the local authority and outside agencies. This has led to many staff developing a good level of knowledge of how to use ICT effectively.
- The school has upgraded its hardware and software and students appreciate the quality, reliability and speed of the new equipment. However, there is still some equipment in the school, which is old, and of inferior quality.

#### Use of Assessment in ICT

The use of assessment in ICT has recently improved and is now adequate.

- The recent intervention by the deputy headteacher has helped to bring about rapid improvements in the use of assessment in ICT.
- There is now better tracking of student progress, more rigorous interrogation of data and a sharper focus on students who are underachieving.
- Although not used consistently well, some ICT lessons are making effective use of checklists to raise students' awareness of how well they are performing.
- Students are now encouraged to reflect on how they can improve their work in ICT and this enables them to progress with minimal teacher support.
- Data and assessment information is not used sufficiently well to inform day-to-day planning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the leadership and management of ICT are at least adequate and contribute to raising standards by the end of Key Stage 4 and students making more progress in both key stages
- ensuring more pupils at Key Stage 3 and 4 attain higher levels

- improving the quality of teaching and learning in ICT by ensuring teachers make better use of data and assessment information to improve their day-to-day planning and that they utilise teaching and learning techniques advocated by national guidance.
- ensuring the ICT curriculum fulfils National Curriculum requirements.

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

Gehane Gordelier  
Her Majesty's Inspector