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Mr J Banks
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Banks

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT (Information Communication Technology)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14-15 October 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 satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are average.

- Students enter the school with standards which are broadly in line with the national average. However this statement masks the wide range of ICT experiences students have had when they enter Year 7. Many of the students have had more opportunities to cover the presenting information and communication aspects of ICT with fewer opportunities for working with spreadsheets and databases.
- By the end of Key Stage 4 students reach standards which are broadly in line with the national average. This means that they make satisfactory progress between Year 7 and Year 11.

- However, the rate of progress made by students has accelerated recently and some students are now making good progress.
- ICT is used well to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The innovative use of computer gaming console to support students with Aspergers and/or Autism is improving communication and motivation.
- Many of the higher attaining students do not reach the standards which they are capable of.
- Students are aware of how to stay safe when using the internet and computers at both home and in school. Awareness of how to stay safe while using new technologies is enhanced through lessons and assemblies. The very small number of incidents of cyber bullying are dealt with very effectively.
- In the lessons seen there were very good working relationships between staff and students. These positive relationships meant that students behaved well when they were using ICT. They were prepared to support each other. They also helped each other to develop their work, and gave, and received, criticism in a very positive manner.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use to prepare lessons well.
- At Key Stage 4 teachers use their good knowledge and understanding of the examination courses to ensure that students make at least satisfactory and often good progress.
- However in some ICT lessons all the students were asked to complete the same work. This means that some of the more able students were not given the opportunity to reach the higher standards. In these lessons the pace was slow and students were not challenged to think about why they were completing a piece of work.
- ICT is used well in other subjects, such as humanities and mathematics. You are part of a pilot project to introduce handheld computers to students and the students involved were very positive about this experience. The use of the handhelds motivates the students, encourages them to do their homework and enables them to organise their lives.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The ICT curriculum is inadequate.

- The students do not receive their entitlement to the National Curriculum at Key Stage 4. In particular most students do not cover the area of control technology.
- You offer a wide range of courses at Key Stage 4 which meet the needs and interests of most of the students. However you are aware of the need to review and develop the curriculum to ensure that it caters for the needs and interests of all the students.

- At Key Stage 3 the students cover the ICT National Curriculum in full, and in just two years. This is because the students receive two hours a week of ICT which is more than usual.
- In Year 9 students are offered the opportunity to complete the ICT Functional Skills course which enhances their economic well-being.
- In particular the mathematics department supports the ICT curriculum by developing the students' knowledge and understanding of spreadsheets.
- Video conferencing is used to good effect. For example, as part of a technology day, Year 7 and 8 students used video conferencing to communicate with a space centre.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are good.

- The strengths and weaknesses of ICT are fully known. Many changes have been made in the past two years and these have impacted positively on the progress students make. These have included: for example, developing the curriculum at Key Stage 3 to enhance the independent learning skills of the students, developing teaching and learning and improving staff-student relationships.
- There is a costed development plan in place to ensure the pace of change is monitored.
- The departmental self evaluation is accurate and links to the development plan.
- The recently completed audit of staff skills shows the areas for concern and a training plan is being developed. The audit encompassed all staff.
- You are fully aware of the technological gap between parents and their children and have provided courses for parents. These are much appreciated and are helping to close the gap.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is satisfactory.

- Students' ICT work which is completed in ICT lessons is regularly assessed. Students and parents are informed of the levels/grades attained three times a year.
- The assessment system for Year 9 enables the students to track their own progress and is starting to enable them to take responsibility for their own learning.
- However the use of assessment in lessons is not fully embedded. This means that the pace and challenge in lessons is less than it could be and that the progress made by the majority of students is only satisfactory.
- ICT is used in many subjects across the curriculum. However the work is rarely assessed in terms of the ICT completed and the assessment is not fed back into the ICT department. This means that the ICT

department is not fully aware of the standard of work, nor the type of work, completed by students in other subjects.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the curriculum at Key Stage 4 covers the National Curriculum and meets the needs and interests of the students
- ensuring that higher attaining students are provided with opportunities to reach the high standards they are capable of
- developing the assessment of ICT across the school and the use of assessment in ICT lessons.

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

Tanya Harber Stuart
Her Majesty's Inspector