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Mr A John  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr John

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 the 26-27 November 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 parts of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is judged to be satisfactory. Much improvement has taken place in the last two years.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is satisfactory, Standards are broadly average

- There has been a significant improvement in the percentage of students achieving the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 4 over the last two years. Improvements in GCSE scores have been rapid, with standards improving from below average to now being in line with national expectations.

- Students attain varying standards because historically they have had variable access to ICT depending on the courses of study chosen and on individual teachers.
- By the end of Key Stage 3 students achieve at or just below expected standards for their age. Across both key stages students have better developed skills than understanding and they therefore sometimes have difficulty applying ICT in different contexts. This, together with their difficulties in remembering, slows progress in lessons.
- Students are taught how to stay safe using ICT. However, they have relatively little understanding of how to cope with email safety, card cloning or identity theft.
- Students' listening skills are good but their speaking skills are weak. Speaking is not improved in lessons because opportunities are missed to develop it, for example, through discussion of the meaning of key words, decoding ICT text, or providing opportunities for extended talk. Opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy are also often missed.
- Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make sound progress; those with a statement of special educational need make good progress because of effective LSA support.
- Students' behaviour is good. In Key Stage 4 they develop good work based skills such as teamwork, though they are not being encouraged to be independent learners because much of the teaching is tightly controlled.

### Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, often good, but on a wide scale from unsatisfactory to outstanding. Strengths include very well explained learning outcomes at the beginning of each lesson and excellent relationships which provide students with the confidence to ask questions. Lessons are well organised, ICT skills teaching is good and differentiation is used well. Teachers' subject knowledge is good but the method chosen to teach a concept is not always the best fit for purpose.
- In the weaker lessons students are given little opportunity to take control of their learning and questioning is instrumental and closed. Often the pace of learning is slow because too much time is spent by the teacher talking and not enough by the students learning. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is little opportunity for the students to use interactive whiteboards. The beginnings of lessons are slow because teachers do not use mental ICT starter activities to motivate the students to quick thinking.

## Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is satisfactory overall. The Key Stage 4 scheme is good because it is helping raise standards. Future planning to widen participation post-16 is good. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is in some need of providing more challenge.
- Across the school there are good opportunities for students to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding in different contexts and subjects, particularly in music, modern foreign languages and mathematics. Much is dependent on individual teachers, the timetable and opportunities to access the relatively limited set of ICT resources. Access to ICT in technology in subjects other than ICT is improving from a very low base but remains below average.

## Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory.

- The leadership and management of ICT overall is satisfactory, though the leadership of the subject itself has weaknesses. For example, the ICT schemes of work are in need of updating and there is no subject handbook that sets out teaching and learning methodologies, assessment, organisation, or professional development (CPD) priorities.
- The 2008-09 subject development plan is very weak because it fails to set targets with success criteria that can be monitored.
- However, at whole school level management is better and senior school leaders have a very accurate self evaluation that identifies correctly what needs to be done to improve.
- Strategies have been put in place that have raised standards over the last two years. The plan for the future that includes trialling the local authority virtual learning environment (VLE) is good and shows the school is pushing hard to improve.

## Use of Assessment

The assessment of ICT is good.

- Teachers use grade descriptors well in Key Stage 3 to show students the level of their work and, crucially, explain what they should do to achieve the next level.
- Key Stage 4 assessment is good and informs students' next stage of learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the leadership and management of ICT as a subject in its own right
- focusing on improving students' learning of ICT and improving independent learning
- making sure lessons begin with more dynamic starter activities that get the students thinking
- mapping the ICT curriculum across the school and from it produce a whole school plan for the use and application of ICT that informs CPD.

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

John Williams  
Her Majesty's Inspector