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Mr D Todd  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Todd

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11-12 December 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 five lessons, where the majority of the lesson was observed.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are broadly in line with national average.

- Students join the school with broadly average capabilities in ICT, although there is no baseline assessment. Cognitive ability tests are used to make predictions for the end of Key Stage 3, including in ICT.
- By the end of Year 9 they reach standards which are broadly average and their achievement is satisfactory. However, more able students are not reaching the higher levels that they should be capable of.
- At Key Stage 4, those who take an ICT qualification reach standards which are broadly average. The progress of other students is evaluated

by teacher assessments towards Level 1 or Level 2 Key Skills, and is satisfactory although not as many reach Level 2 as might be expected.

- In the sixth form, standards in the AS level course undertaken by all students have been low and the school recognises that progress is inadequate.
- Opportunities for extended use of ICT by higher attaining students are not yet well developed.
- Through an innovative approach developed as a partnership between departments, the police and fire brigade, which creates a crime scene with students as investigators, students are taught about how to stay safe online. They are beginning to use the developing virtual learning platform to access and submit work from home in some subject areas.
- Students are becoming more involved in assessing their work themselves, with some reference to success criteria, although this is at a very early stage. As a result, personal development within ICT is satisfactory.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to make good use of ICT resources to help them access the curriculum, through the support of teaching assistants and teachers.
- Boys and girls reach similar standards and most topics ensure they are suitably engaged.

#### Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in ICT is satisfactory.

- The subject knowledge of teachers within ICT is good and they have a clear view of the requirements of the qualifications being followed.
- However, lessons do not always provide work that challenges students, particularly the more able. Differentiation is too often by outcome alone and expectations are too low.
- Assessment is being developed, but is not currently used effectively to provide additional challenge or support as necessary, towards raising standards.
- Some other subject leaders have well developed plans showing how ICT is used and integrated into their curriculum as a powerful learning tool but this is not consistent across all subjects.
- Attention is beginning to focus on how the virtual learning platform will improve learning.

#### Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the ICT curriculum is satisfactory.

- All students in Key Stage 3 and 4 have timetabled lessons which follow a recognised commercial scheme of work. Additional aspects are covered to ensure that statutory requirements are met.
- The requirements of the courses are being made more explicit to students and they are developing their understanding of what is required to achieve particular grades or levels; this is at an early stage of development.

- However, in both Key Stages 3 and 4, the work provided does not stretch students enough in order that those who can, reach the higher levels or grades.
- Until recently, all sixth form students were required to undertake a qualification, but the school recognised that this led to poor motivation and low standards. Students can now choose to take an AS level over two years, or to do the extended project, including a considerable ICT component. This is viewed more positively by the students but it is too early to see the impact on standards.
- In some subjects, ICT and the learning platform are being used as powerful tools to enhance learning. This is not yet consistent across departments.

### Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory.

- The ICT resources are well managed and suitable training has been made available to staff.
- You have developed a vision for ICT and this is beginning to be communicated to staff. In some subjects there is a lack of understanding about how ICT can be used effectively to raise standards.
- The evaluation of the ICT department is accurate and leads to suitable areas for development.
- Within the ICT department, leadership has been too slow to provide a strong lead on key issues including consistent tracking of progress, raising of standards and promoting independence of use for students.
- Recent improvements to the infrastructure have helped to improve the experience of students and increase the confidence of staff to use ICT.
- The exemplary use of ICT within the competence based curriculum, developed for Year 7, is helping to provide an impetus to other departments to improve their use of ICT. Further plans to improve provision have been carefully developed and are well advanced.

### Use of Assessment

The use of assessment of ICT is satisfactory.

- Baseline assessment of ICT capability does not take place; instead, cognitive ability tests are used to predict attainment at the end of the key stages. This leads to targets that are not sufficiently accurate to be useful.
- Assessment within the ICT department is adequate, although not consistently completed. Work is marked and useful feedback given to students.
- The tracking of progress in ICT is quite recent and is beginning to be used more effectively to ensure students make the progress they should. However, it does not yet lead to additional support or challenge where it is needed.
- Students are beginning to be guided to use level descriptors or success criteria to evaluate their work. Many students know what grade they

are aiming for but are not always clear about the next step they need to take to achieve this.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- implementing consistent tracking systems for ICT so that the progress of all students is monitored
- ensuring that work in ICT gives students opportunities to be more independent in how they fulfil the success criteria and work at a suitable pace
- increasing the proportion of good or better teaching within ICT, so that there are higher expectations of students and that they receive the challenge and support they need to raise standards
- ensuring that the use of ICT across the subjects more closely matches that of the best examples.

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

Andrew Saunders  
Additional Inspector