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27 November 2008

Mrs H Cryer
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cryer

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 26-27 November 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 seven part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement in ICT is satisfactory. Standards reached at the end of each key stage are broadly in line with national standards.

- Attainment on entry is measured through a combination of Key Stage 2 SATs results and CATs. The results of testing show that attainment on entry is broadly in line with the national average.
- In consultation with the Local Authority the school sets appropriate targets for the progress students should make in ICT in Key Stages 3 and 4. Targets are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure appropriate challenge is maintained.

- There has been a gradual rise in standards over the last three years. Standards of achievement are broadly average compared to national standards for Key Stage 3 and 4. Students make satisfactory progress in both key stages.
- Students at the school like ICT and appreciate the effort their teachers make. They also behave very well in ICT lessons, approaching their work with maturity.
- The progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good because teaching assistants work well with students and teachers.
- Students are taught how to stay safe when using ICT and display good levels of understanding in this area.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Teachers took in to account the differing abilities and needs of students in their classes and planned lessons accordingly. The school's lesson planning document plus the data made available to teachers enabled teachers to plan in a methodical way.
- The good lessons seen were characterised by a prompt start where lesson aims and learning objectives were shared. Students were given opportunities to work together in groups to support each other if they preferred. The teachers had organised support materials to enable students to work independently for an extended period and make good progress according to ability. Lesson pace was such that students were engaged in all aspects of the lesson and always had a learning task available. For example in a good ICT lesson in Year 11 students developed their ability to use a professional graphics programme successfully. Students were given extended individual time and effectively supported each other to develop skills in combining images. They were also able to use written feedback from the teacher to help identify where and how to improve.
- In satisfactory lessons the pace of the lesson was slower. This was because students spent more time listening to the teacher or on short teacher directed tasks. Opportunities for students to work in groups or progress at their own pace were less.
- Students were particularly appreciative of the opportunities given to them to work using a laptop computer if they wanted to. For example in Key Stage 4 English lessons students can choose to draft essays using a laptop computer if they prefer.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The curriculum is inadequate.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 4 is currently in transition. All Year 11 students are completing either the award in digital applications (AIDA) or certificate in digital applications (CIDA) courses. Year 10 students opted for one of two ICT courses, about 30% of students, opted for the AIDA course whilst

the rest study a much reduced course leading to a qualification in ICT Functional Skills.

- The ICT curriculum at Key Stage 4 has changed significantly over the last three years and there are further changes planned. The school has taken into account the needs of the students and opted to deliver ICT qualifications which are more vocational in their approach. However the curriculum offered to students in Year 10, who do not do the AIDA course, does not adequately give students the opportunity to reach the higher levels of the National Curriculum due to the limited time given to it. In addition opportunities for students to learn about control are not available in Years 10 or 11.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 has developed. Teachers have adapted the National Strategy units to make them more appropriate to the particular needs and interests of students at the school. Levels of attainment have been gradually rising because students are finding the lessons more engaging. However opportunities for students to control devices using sequences and programming do not fully cover the National Curriculum requirements.
- There is much use of ICT throughout the rest of the school but this is not sufficiently well monitored and evaluated to ensure efficient and full coverage of the National Curriculum for ICT.
- Developments of the school's virtual learning environment (VLE) have suffered a set back recently due to the requirement placed on the school to change its software package by the local authority. Developments are now at an early stage and students do not currently have access to an adequate range of on-line resources to enable them to extend their learning out of lessons.

Leadership and management of ICT

The leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory.

- The whole school strategic leadership and management of ICT offered by you and your leadership team are good, ICT provision is developing well across the school. Recent purchases of large numbers of laptop computers have resulted in much improved availability and use of ICT in all areas.
- There is a systematic and thorough evaluation of progress made by students resulting in development plans which include the development of ICT in the school. The ICT department development plan is up to date and provides targets for monitoring progress. Departments across the school have ICT development targets embedded into their plans.
- Department leaders across the school audit the ICT training needs of staff during the year and pass this information to the ICT coordinator. Training courses are organised according to need and have resulted in improve ICT capability for school staff. For example courses in the use of Interactive Whiteboards have been much appreciated.
- Subject areas across the school have nominated 'ICT leaders' who are improving the use of ICT in their own areas. However this is not

coordinated enough to ensure that the learning opportunities in each subject build on previous learning elsewhere.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is inadequate.

- There is an effective whole school 'traffic light' system in place enabling senior leaders to effectively monitor the progress of students. In accordance with this system the progress students make in their ICT lessons is measured three times per year resulting in thorough group analysis including that made by girls compared to boys. Progress information is provided to the ICT leader and results in appropriate action, for example support is put in place for students falling behind and 'praise cards' are sent home.
- Assessments of ICT progress made by students across the whole curriculum is not gathered together or made available to the coordinator for ICT. Assessment of levels is therefore based on an incomplete picture and is not fully secure.
- At Key Stage 3 and 4 students are not given enough feedback about their progress to enable them to be aware of their level of achievement at all times. They do know their progress at the 'traffic light' points, but feedback from teachers does not enable them to judge how well they are doing at other times. Marking is infrequent and does not include sufficient comments on what to do to improve. Feedback to students is primarily verbal, rather than written, although students do appreciate the amount of help they get from their teachers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing the curriculum to ensure it covers all required aspects of the National Curriculum
- increasing the frequency and formality of assessment to ensure that students know their progress and are able to make informed decisions on how to improve
- developing the VLE to provide resources for students to enable them to become independent learners.

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

Clifford Mainey
Additional Inspector