04 December 2008

Mr C Pemberton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pemberton

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 3-4 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 part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Attainment on entry is assessed through a unit of work called 'My Life'. Assessment of this topic shows students' attainment on entry to be broadly average for ICT. Key Stage 2 SATs, FFTD data and CATs are used to establish targets, however these are then raised to ensure very challenging targets are in place for all students.
- By the end of Key Stage 3 students have made very good progress and standards in ICT are above average. Rapid progress is achieved in Key Stage 4 so that by the end of Year 11 standards are exceptionally high. Almost all students achieve a GCSE grade C in ICT and around one half of students achieve the top A* and A grades.

- ICT use across the school is substantial and achievement is very good. Students say they enjoy using ICT around the school because it enables them to work more creatively and efficiently.
- Students are taught how to stay safe when using ICT and display very good levels of understanding in this area. Safety issues are covered each year in ICT lessons and by Year 11 students have sophisticated knowledge.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported and make the same outstanding progress as other students. There is impressive collaborative working between the ICT department and Learning Support personnel. This along with careful monitoring and appropriately differentiated work contributes to the excellent progress students make here.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

Teaching and learning are good.

- Lessons are well planned and teachers have good classroom management skills, curriculum understanding and technical knowledge. These factors combined with a good choice of engaging activities ensures learning proceeds at a rapid pace. The quality of support materials available on-line and on display boards is outstanding and contributes significantly to progress.
- The better lessons had a prompt start where learning objectives were shared and links were made with 'real world' situations. Students worked very effectively in groups to support each other and learning was brisk because there were interesting learning tasks available to all students. For example in an outstanding Year 9 lesson students developed their ability to use a professional graphics programme very successfully. The teacher skilfully managed short group activities to develop students' sensitivity to the aesthetic quality of greetings cards. Students were then immediately able to apply this learning to improve their own designs. Extended individual working time was very efficiently managed and pupils supported each other with commendable maturity.
- The innovative use of technology across the curriculum is contributing to the very good progress students make. For example students have good access to video cameras and can, when appropriate, choose to make videos instead of writing. Students and teachers are making use of 'pod casting' to make teaching resources to publish on the school's intranet. Short video clips are available to demonstrate to students how to use advanced features of some of the school's software. Hand held technology is used in citizenship lessons in Year 9 to enable students to make anti-bullying videos. Here students use their own mobile phones to film, edit and then publish their work on the school's intranet.
- There has recently been a significant investment in a wireless network and laptop computers recently to make ICT resources more available in classrooms across the school. The increased flexibility brought by the laptops has had a significant motivating effect because they have

increased the diversity of learning opportunities teachers can make available to students.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The curriculum is outstanding.

- There is excellent provision for all aspects of the National Curriculum including very good opportunities for students to learn about control technology, sequencing and programming. Students also make very good use of presentation software, datalogging, spreadsheets and databases within the ICT department and across the school.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is based on the National Strategy units and is providing opportunities for pupils to work more independently. The units have been adapted to increase pace and coverage is expanded particularly in the areas of control technology and graphics.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum allows students to follow different routes to a GCSE level qualification based on their abilities and interests. This very effectively maintains challenge and interest and contributes to the outstanding results achieved.
- AS and A2 ICT courses are the most popular courses in the sixth form. The curriculum here is innovative, exciting and very successful. A high proportion of students complete both AS and A2 level courses and results are exceptionally high.
- The school recognises it needs to map the kinds of experiences students are getting in all subjects to ensure teaching and learning builds on all previous experiences the students have gained.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The leadership of the ICT department is outstanding. Departmental documentation is impressive and extensive. Results are very carefully analysed and evaluated, curriculum plans are comprehensive and development plans are concise and clear. A very useful handbook guides the work of the ICT team covering work schemes and policies.
- Strategic leadership of ICT across the school is outstanding and throughout the school the quality of self-evaluation is excellent. Departments consider their own ICT use and development requirements, including training. The results of self-evaluation are used to inform whole school development planning and ICT equipment procurement. The school's vision and plans for developing the ICT curriculum in the future are well thought through. Governors are fully involved and effectively hold the leadership of the school to account. The school has a very good understanding of its strengths and the areas it needs to develop further.
- The school's specialist status in mathematics and computing has enabled it to increase the provision of ICT equipment throughout all areas of the school. The network is well designed and the ratio of computers to students, at roughly 1:2, is better than the national

average. Recent purchases of laptop computers are enabling a more flexible approach to be developed and are particularly welcomed by the students. For example in mathematics students are able to use laptops and web based resources particularly effectively.

- The principles of best value are ensuring that ICT resources meet the needs of students as well as providing value for money. Further assessment of the impact ICT is having on learning would benefit the school in reviewing its ICT related investments.

Use of Assessment

The quality of assessment is good.

- Students' work in ICT is very regularly assessed and their progress towards their target grades is monitored carefully by the ICT department leader and student progress managers. The progress students are making is shared with students every lesson via a colour coded spreadsheet display which shows current and predicted progress for each student. Students are able to get 'on demand' assessment with instant feedback and can clearly see their progress record change to record their successes during the lessons. Any student identified as not making significant progress is given extra support to catch up.
- Students are very appreciative of the level of support and guidance offered by their teachers "ICT gives me the most useful assessments in the school" was how one Year 11 student characterised the quality of assessment from her ICT teacher. Students have access to examples of work completed by previous cohorts to help them understand what it is they have to do get to higher levels. Frequent marking and access to a teacher to go through their work with them individually were particularly welcomed by students.
- Sometimes teachers of other subjects are unaware of the progress students have made in ICT lessons. The school has identified the need to make more detailed assessment information available to teachers of other subjects.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- mapping the use of ICT by other subjects and sharing assessment information between subject teams
- improving the assessment of the impact ICT equipment is having on learning across 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

Clifford Mainey
Additional Inspector