06 February 2009

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Dear Mrs Black

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 29-30 January 2009 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 good.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is good. Standards are above average.

- The school's evaluation of available data and discussion with students show that most students enter with standards of ICT that are below expectations.
- They make good progress during their time at school, to achieve standards that are broadly average when they leave the school.
- This year, students are taking the OCR National qualification, and preliminary data suggests that the standards being reached are steadily improving.

- A few students take the Creative Media vocational course, including functional ICT. There is not yet sufficient data to say what standards these students will reach in either course, although teacher assessments suggest that standards will be above average.
- Students are effectively involved in assessing their own and each others' work, with clear reference to success criteria. As a result, personal development within ICT is good.
- Outside of the ICT department, new technologies are used effectively to provide challenge and resources for students to undertake high quality work. There is a good and improving understanding of the level of work that can be expected, and teachers are becoming more ambitious in their view of what students can do.
- Internet safety is given a high priority; as a result students have a clear view of the dangers online and are well aware of the need for responsible use of the internet and social networking sites. They acknowledge that there have occasionally been isolated incidents of cyber-bullying, but they feel the school has prepared them well and responds appropriately.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to make good use of ICT resources to help them access the curriculum, well supported by the teaching assistants.
- Boys and girls reach similar standards and topics used to deliver course work ensure they are suitably engaged.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

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

- The subject knowledge of teachers within ICT is good and they have a clear view of the requirements of the qualifications being followed.
- Lessons provide work that is suitably challenging for most pupils, and increasingly open-ended for the more able pupils. This is improving even further the independence of students in using the available new technologies.
- Availability of ICT resources is excellent, including the learning resource centre, banks of full laptops and mini-laptops, interactive whiteboards in almost all rooms, use of interactive quiz technology, and the recent opening of the radio studio. Some students bring their own laptops and the school has worked with them to make sure that resources are accessible in a suitable manner.
- ICT is embedded effectively as a tool in most aspects of the learning environment, including the school farm, and this has a very positive impact on the achievement of students. The confidence of all staff in using ICT has been carefully and systematically improved through the carefully structured training programme available for all staff.
- You have begun making use of Moodle as your learning platform and some subjects are leading the way in exploring reflectively how this can benefit students.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the ICT curriculum is good.

- The ICT curriculum is well planned and carefully monitored to ensure that all students receive appropriate training through timetabled lessons. Students cover all aspects of the curriculum, some areas being delivered through other subjects, such as science, design technology (DT) and mathematics.
- Occasionally tasks set for students are too constraining, staff limit the setting, the range of data used, or specify the particular software students must use. This is being reviewed and will help to ensure the most able are suitably challenged.
- Many skills are extended or developed through other subjects, as teachers increase the challenge in what the tasks demand of students. Each department is clear about which aspects of ICT they should be developing and these are included in department development plans and lesson planning.
- The music specialism contributes strongly to the use of ICT, as the department is very well resourced and is a regular user of these resources. It provides very good links to real world use of computers and technologies. The radio studio contributes well to the development of good speaking and listening skills across other subjects.
- Subjects such as textiles and dance are also very strong users of ICT and effectively model the effective use of new technologies such as manipulating digital video.
- The recent addition of the Creative Media diploma includes development of strong ICT skills for those who chose it, as well as the delivery of functional ICT skills.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management of ICT are outstanding.

- The vision for ICT in the school is exciting and ambitious and clearly regarded as a driving force in improving the school in all aspects. You have vigorously tackled the areas that needed improvement following the last subject survey and have successfully raised the quality of ICT, resulting in good achievement and rising standards.
- This vision is strongly communicated and is understood and embraced by both teachers and students. They are excited to be part of its development.
- There has been an emphasis on improving provision and reliability of the technologies necessary to deliver the vision and this is now in place to an extent where the rest of the vision is becoming reality.
- You are aware that there are some students who do not easily have as much access to ICT resources outside of school. There are plans being developed to address this to ensure all students have suitable access at appropriate times.
- As further needs are identified through regular audits across all subject areas, you have found ways to ensure the support and training is available to make these things happen.
- A particular powerful tool in bringing about improvements has been the 'Learning Detectives' project, where students themselves evaluate teaching and learning and identify the best features. These were

effectively communicated to staff and have had a very positive impact in improving teaching and learning, particularly focused on the use of ICT.

- Overall, the leadership have provided an exciting vision towards a compelling future for ICT and all those involved are keen to help bring this about.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment of ICT is good.

- You work closely with feeder primary schools, both to understand the capabilities of students when they join the school and to improve provision and development of skills before they arrive. However, you have found that the picture is not always complete or clear, and so have looked at other ways to make an accurate judgement of attainment on entry. Currently a proportional use of the average points score for English, mathematics and science is used to give a more accurate evaluation of ICT capability. You are currently looking at other solutions to reinforce this and increase the accuracy.
- Assessment has been developed well, and is used effectively to provide additional challenge or support as necessary, towards raising standards.
- Assessment within the ICT department is accurate and shows good understanding of the requirements of the different courses undertaken.
- Tracking leads to the identification of students who need support and ways are found to provide this.
- Students routinely evaluate both their own and each other's work and actively seek out ways to improve it. In most lessons, they have very clear criteria against which to measure what they have done, related to the course they are following. This means that they are confident in knowing what they need to do next, to reach the next grade or achieve their targets.
- You set challenging targets for ICT, both overall and for individuals.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring tasks are open ended, so that there is increased challenge for the more able pupils
- further developing the use of accurate baseline assessment of ICT capability so that progress can be more precisely evaluated
- identifying and supporting any pupils who may not easily have access to ICT outside of school.

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.

Ofsted gathers information on the immediate and longer-term impact of survey inspections, both on the institutions themselves, and with a view to improving its own processes. To this end, I should be grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire and return it within the next ten days. We have also just sent a copy of the questionnaire by email. Please return your completed questionnaire to either the email or postal address on the form, not to me. We may also contact some schools by telephone after several months in order for us to gain a picture of longer-term impact. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Saunders
Additional Inspector