16 March 2009

Mr J Didymus
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Didymus

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 February 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 satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are broadly average.

- Students enter the school with standards which are broadly in line with the national expectations. You establish the students' standards by conducting a base line test when students enter the school.
- During Key Stage 3 students make good progress in ICT. By the end of Key Stage 3 students reach standards which are above national expectations.
- At Key Stage 4 students make satisfactory progress. This is because of the good level of skills, knowledge and understanding they have at the end of Key Stage 3 which they then apply in all their subjects across

the school. Those students who also take a GCSE in ICT make better progress because they learn new ICT skills and increase their capability. Their achievement is good.

- Students at post-16 who take the vocational qualification in ICT make good progress to reach standards that are above average. Those who take the Key Skills course make good progress to achieve good pass rates.
- Students have good attitudes to learning when they are using new technologies. They are motivated by the use of the ICT in lessons and their behaviour is good.
- Students are well prepared to keep themselves safe online, as there is suitable teaching and learning of the dangers and students have appropriate understanding of them. Students said that you react promptly and effectively to any breach of the internet use agreement.
- ICT is an effective tool in supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These students make good progress. They are encouraged to develop skills, such as keyboard skills, which will help them make greater progress in other areas. Portable computers are used, for example for research, presentation and organising of ideas, to help these students be more independent.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the ICT courses taught.
- In the best lessons members of staff ensure that the work the students are asked to complete challenges them. In these lessons the work is tailored to the needs and interests of the students and this motivates the students.
- However in some lessons students' progress is limited because of the restrictions placed on them. This is usually because the members of staff restrict the range of software the students are allowed to use.
- Within this limited range of software the students' skills are well developed and these skills are shared and understood across the school.
- Within the ICT department, the assessment of work is carefully planned and accurate. Tracking has been refined to give useful information to help students and teachers know what needs to be done to reach the next level or grade.
- Across the school ICT is well embedded as part of the learning process. For example in geography it is used as an effective research tool and databases are used as a way of managing recipes.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the ICT curriculum is satisfactory.

- The ICT curriculum is well planned and allows students of all abilities to make at least satisfactory process.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 3 has been reviewed. It reflects the changes in the National Curriculum. There is now more emphasis on students understanding whether a solution to a problem is fit for purpose and students are now more able to make appropriate changes in the light of feedback from users.
- The ICT department regularly review which courses the students follow. The courses meet the needs and interests of the students and are relevant to them.
- The science specialism has enhanced the amount of ICT resources in the school. In particular the science department has benefited from new data logging equipment and laptops. The science specialism is also developing the students' knowledge and understanding of how computers are used in the 'real world'.
- The curriculum provided for students who do not take an ICT qualification is satisfactory.
- Fewer girls than boys take an ICT qualification. However the ICT is supporting the development of girls' ICT capability through extra curriculum activities such as a computer club for girls.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- You have ensured that the availability of ICT resources is excellent. There is a well resourced learning resource centre, the computer suites are readily available and interactive whiteboards are in almost all rooms. Many departments have up-to-date specialist equipment to allow development of specific skills, such as programming the laser cutter, control technology and data-logging.
- The ICT department has focused on improving the provision for students in Key Stage 3 and those students taking an ICT qualification. This focus has raised the standards these students reach and increased the progress they make.
- You have acknowledged that the assessment of ICT for those not taking an ICT examination course at Key Stage 4 is inadequate. You are evaluating the strategies you could put in place to rectify this. However, this inadequate assessment means that these students, although making satisfactory progress, make less progress than their peers.
- You have a clear vision for ICT. This is communicated to the school by you and the ICT department. ICT is used proactively in all subject areas as a tool to develop lessons and learning. Students are given the opportunity to produce animations which motivates them to learn.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is inadequate.

- Students, when they enter the school, are given a short course in ICT skills. At the end of this course they are given a base line test. This base line assessment ensures that work is appropriate to the students and that their progress can be accurately assessed.

- Challenging ICT targets are set for students at Key Stage 3, and those who take an ICT qualification at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However those who do not take an accredited course at Key Stage 4 do not have targets to work towards.
- For those students taking an accredited ICT course the assessment is effective. It gives the students helpful feedback about what level they are at and what they need to do to improve further. This helpful assessment has contributed to the rising standards.
- However the assessment of work for those students at Key Stage 4 who do not take an accredited course is inadequate. This is because their assessments are not fed back to the ICT department. As a result, similar work is sometimes undertaken in various subjects and skills are not developed further.
- As part of the assessment process many students learn to evaluate their work, and that of their peers. However this is inconsistent.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all members of staff are aware of the students' ability levels to enable knowledge, skills and understanding to be developed particularly for those students who do not take an accredited course at Key Stage 4
- developing the use of peer assessment to enable all students to know what they have to do to improve their work and make better progress
- ensuring that the ICT department are fully aware of the progress made by students in all subjects.

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