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Dear Mr Shaw

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 19-20 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 three part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is outstanding and standards are exceptionally high.

- All students undertake a topic of ICT work on 'a haunted house' in their first few weeks at the school. Assessment of this topic shows students' attainment on entry to be broadly average.
- Students make rapid progress in ICT so that by the end of Key Stage 3 standards are above average for their age group. By the time students complete Key Stage 4 standards are exceptionally high. All students in this mixed ability school achieve at least a GCSE grade C in ICT and around two thirds of students consistently achieve the top A* and A grades.

- Students are extremely well behaved and self motivated. The school actively seeks ways of creating opportunities for students to work independently using ICT which students appreciate. They say they enjoy using ICT in their lessons because it makes learning more active and interesting. Relationships and attitudes to learning are excellent.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same outstanding progress as other students. This is because they are extremely well supported by teaching assistants in ICT lessons and because innovative use of voice recognition software is helping these students succeed in all subjects where before they were struggling. Students regularly using this software told the inspector that: 'I can work faster and more independently because I don't have to ask for help with my spellings all the time' and 'it has made me get a lot more involved in the lessons because I know I can now do the work without getting left behind'. One Year 11 girl who has been using voice recognition software since she was in Year 8 said it had 'changed her life'. She is now predicted to attain good grades at GCSE and says the software has made a huge difference to her confidence and self-esteem.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

Teaching and learning are outstanding.

- Teachers have excellent subject and technical knowledge which enables students to learn to use the more complex and difficult functionality of spreadsheet and database applications.
- Lessons are well planned and teachers have strong classroom management skills. Combined with a good choice of engaging activities, learning proceeds at a cracking pace.
- The ICT department has a 'development area' which allows students to try out the skills they are learning on the standard school software packages on different operating systems and different versions of the same software. This is at the early stages but already it is helping students to understand the similarities and differences between different operating systems and software and is helping them develop transferable skills. The school has plans to extend this mixed provision of hardware and software.
- There is extensive and sometimes innovative use of ICT to improve learning in other subjects. For instance hand held technology is used in English to enable students to work on film clips independently.
- The school has made a significant investment in a wireless network and a large number of laptops to make ICT resources available in classrooms in all subject areas. Older students say that using laptops in their other subjects has 'changed learning' because it enables them to work independently and makes learning in such lessons more active.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The curriculum is outstanding.

- There is excellent provision for all aspects of the National Curriculum including opportunities for students to use spreadsheets, databases and to learn control technology and programming. Students use ICT in other subjects to communicate and present their ideas. Year 7 students create a digital 'photo story' and commentary to explain what mediaeval life was like in nearby Ludlow. In science students use videos of their experiments to illustrate their understanding of reactions.
- The curriculum is challenging. Year 9 students begin a qualification designed for older students a year early. All students pursue a vocational qualification in ICT at Key Stage 4. The school deliberately chooses the most difficult modules to ensure the work is sufficiently challenging for its students.
- Having succeeded in encouraging the widespread use of ICT in all subject areas, the school recognises it needs to map what kinds of experiences students are getting and in which subjects to ensure provision remains challenging.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The quality of self-evaluation is excellent giving the school an extremely good understanding of its strengths and the areas it needs to develop further. ICT has a central place in the school's vision and plans for developing the curriculum in the future. Strategic leadership of ICT across the school and leadership of the ICT team are both outstanding.
- The school's specialist status in mathematics and computing has been used well to improve provision for ICT which in turn has been used to improve the quality of learning in other subjects. The school believes using ICT to improve learning in all subjects has been, along with its rigorous approach to target setting, fundamental to it becoming a high performing school. The school is federated with a neighbouring primary school which can now share the same quality of ICT resources and which benefits from having a visiting member of the ICT team teach the older pupils.
- Departmental documentation is superb. The ICT development plan is concise and clear in setting out what needs to be done, by when and how it will be evaluated. A comprehensive and useful handbook guides the work of the ICT team. Management of the ICT department and of ICT resources is excellent.
- Good attention is given to applying the principles of 'best value' in ensuring ICT resources meet the needs of students and the community as well as providing excellent value for money. Consequently the school is able to provide roughly one modern computer for every two

students which is a much better ratio than is seen nationally. The network is well designed to meet the current and likely future needs of the school.

Use of Assessment

The quality of assessment is good.

- Students' work in ICT is regularly assessed and their progress over the year towards their target grades is diligently tracked. Any student identified as falling behind is given extra support to catch up. The school says this is a key factor in ensuring its examination results are so good.
- Students have their own copies of the assessment criteria which they use to benchmark the quality of their own work against. They have access to examples of work at different levels completed by older students to help them understand what is expected. They are clear about their current levels of performance and appreciative of the frequent guidance they get from their teachers on how to improve their work. They say having the teacher go through their work with them individually pointing out where and how it could be improved is particularly helpful.
- Students' use of ICT when working in other subjects is not formally assessed. Sometimes teachers of other subjects are unaware of just quite how good students' capabilities in ICT are. The school has identified the need to make ICT 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.

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

David Anstead
Her Majesty's Inspector