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06 July 2009

Mr I Potter
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Dear Mr Potter

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 23-24 June 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 discussions with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and joint observations of five part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is good and standards are broadly in line with national averages.

- Attainment of ICT on entry to the school although below average is improving. However, students arrive in Year 7 with a broad range of ICT experiences.
- Standards have risen significantly in the last three years and are now broadly average by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. Students make good progress overall in developing an appropriate range of ICT skills and capabilities in Key Stages 3 and 4. Although the percentages are increasing, too few students attain the higher levels.
- Students develop particularly good presentational skills and take good account of different audiences and purposes when planning their work. They are confident and competent at using a range of ICT independently and creatively to support their learning needs; this includes the use of the school's virtual

learning environment (VLE). Students are generally less skilled at filtering and handling data and using this information to produce graphs.

- The relatively small cohort of students who do ICT in the sixth form progress well. They attain standards in computing that are in line with national averages and high standards in applied ICT A Levels.
- The school makes good use of ICT to support the needs of vulnerable students. This includes the use of laptop and specialist software to help raise standards for example in literacy and numeracy.
- There are pockets of excellent practise in the school in which ICT is being used by some teachers for example in art, design technology, music, French, and government and politics to help accelerate learning and raise standards in these subjects.
- The school's specialist status in mathematics and technology has enabled the school to make outstanding use of ICT to support work related to business and enterprise, resulting in the school winning the Big Business Challenge in the South 2009.
- ICT makes a good contribution to students' personal development and well-being. Through their use of the internet, students have gained a deeper appreciation of world affairs and other cultures and countries, such as links forged with an orphanage in Malawi, with a school in France and more recently with a school in China.
- The school's programme of work on citizenship has made a significant contribution to students' understanding of how to keep themselves safe when using technology, including the use of chat rooms, the internet and mobile phones.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.

- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. However, they do not always make full use of the range of teaching strategies to ensure all students, especially the higher attainers, make the progress of which they are capable.
- Good teaching in the school is characterised by high expectations, clear learning objectives that are focused on developing skills through meaningful activities. In these lessons, work is well matched to students' interests and takes full account of their prior aptitudes and needs. Where lessons are less effective they are too teacher directed despite the students being able to work independently. Teachers at times spend too much time talking while students sit passively and this slows the pace of learning. In a small minority of cases, there are insufficient strategies to support the needs of the lower attaining students. However, a common feature of lessons is the limited use of self-assessment strategies.
- There is good support provided for students with learning difficulties and disabilities in lessons by additional adults.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The ICT department has made good progress in developing a curriculum that is relevant and interesting for students at Key Stage 3 and offers more choice

and different pathways at Key Stages 4 and post-16. Consequently, boys are more engaged with their learning, particularly at Key Stage 3.

- There is a good focus on programming by the end of Key Stage 3 and this prepares students well for Key Stage 4.
- The good work of the ICT across the curriculum (ICTAC) group is promoting greater use of ICT across the curriculum, for example by sharing and disseminating good practice.
- In modern foreign languages, students who usually struggle with their reading and writing, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, produce work of high quality when they are able to research topics and use a range of media to complete their work.
- Departments such as English are taking more account of ICT competencies because of the requirement to use ICT in some of the units of work. A good example is the media recasting unit, in which students recast editing and manipulating pieces of text, using a different medium such as a literary text as a news report.
- There are good opportunities for students to be creative in their use of ICT in discrete ICT lessons as well as in their use of ICT in other subjects. A good example was seen in the sixth form with students using multimedia to explore figurative language and semantics within literature. In this lesson, they used different formats of images and video to create their own artistic interpretation of work they had been doing in English literature.
- The good level and range of ICT resourcing in the school, enables ICT to be used in a range of subjects and in a range of locations. However students report frustrations about the limited access to printers and the unreliability of printers and some laptops.
- There are some subjects in which ICT is being used particularly well; however, the application of ICT has yet to become firmly embedded throughout the school and within all departments.

Leadership and management of ICT

The leadership and management of ICT are good overall.

- The specialist status has had a significant impact in helping to improve provision for ICT over the last five years. The school now has a clear staffing and technical infrastructure which has helped to raise standards across the school.
- The vision for ICT is an integral part of the school's vision for its specialism in mathematics and computing.
- The specialist school committee of governors holds the school to account for the progress made towards targets including ICT.
- The ICT department has received good support from the school's senior management, during the absence of the head of department.
- Key members of staff within the ICT department are developing their roles well and are contributing satisfactorily to the effective and reflective leadership and management of the department. This is helping to raise standards.
- Key leaders provide good training for staff and this is improving the level of staff confidence and competence in using ICT as a teaching and learning tool.
- Leaders and managers have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are successful in helping to bring about improvement, such as the increased level of engagement and better performance of lower attaining boys.

- However, action plans do not focus sharply enough on the intended outcomes for different groups of learners and do not fully reflect some of the good work that is taking place in the department.
- Leaders and managers are aware of the need to recruit more girls to post-16 courses and are developing effective strategies to help meet this challenge.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment in ICT is good.

- Students' attainment in ICT on entry to Year 7 is assessed and this enables staff to set work which builds effectively on students' previous knowledge and skills.
- There is good tracking of the progress made by different groups of students. This contributes to self-evaluation and the targeting of underperformance.
- The ICT department is beginning to set more challenging targets and is involving students in the setting and reviewing of their targets.
- Students are aware of their targets and make effective use of level descriptors in some lessons to check their progress.
- Students complete a self-evaluation at the end of units of work in Key Stage 3. In Key Stages 3 and 4 students also discuss their work and their progress with their teachers.
- Staff and students are making effective use of the VLE to support the assessment of students' work.
- The use of assessment strategies to support and enhance learning during the course of lessons, although developing well has yet to become firmly embedded.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- embedding the use of assessment strategies in lessons and raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve, particularly the higher attainers, so that more students attain higher levels
- improving the quality of the department's action planning so it articulates more clearly the intended outcomes for targeted groups of learners.

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 local Learning and Skills Council. The letter will be published on the Ofsted website it will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector