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Dear Mr Rossi

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 7-8 July 2009 to look at work in ICT.

As outlined in the 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of five part lessons of which the three were done jointly with different senior managers.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are broadly in line with national averages and rising.

- Attainment on entry to the school is above average. Students make satisfactory progress and attain standards that are above average by the end of Key Stage 3.
- Progress at Key Stage 4 having previously been inadequate is now satisfactory and standards are now broadly in line with national averages. Unvalidated data indicates that there are more students set to be awarded higher grades.
- Standards reached by the very low numbers of students choosing to do ICT in the sixth form are satisfactory overall.
- Students are particularly adept at producing presentations of high quality, which take account of audiences. They make good use of graphics programmes and office packages, and make effective use of ICT as a communication tool for example in their use of emails.

- The impact of the school's specialist status for mathematics and computing has an excellent impact on the school's outstanding results in science and mathematics and increasingly in other subjects including geography, modern foreign languages religious education and in art and design.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress towards their targets thanks to the use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool and how well it is used by highly skilled specialist support staff.
- Students demonstrate a high level of awareness of know how to keep themselves safe when using technology; older students also recognise the importance of using encryption to help safeguard the contents of documents.
- The use of ICT contributes very well to students' personal develop and well-being. An extremely good example is how it is used for students in Year 12 to support younger students in discussing ethical as well as moral issues.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- ICT lessons are now taught by specialists and there are examples of good practice in the department.
- Strengths in teaching include staff's subject knowledge; the clarity and sharing of learning objectives; the use of visual aids such as film clips to engage students from the beginning of lessons; good opportunities for students to use their skills to solve problems and take account of audiences. A good example of this was in Year 10 with students using story boards to plan a video which included planning camera shots to help orientate viewers.
- Where teaching is less effective, there is not enough modelling of new and unfamiliar skills in the introductory part of lessons; at times teaching does not take sufficient account of what students already know; and students are more focused on the activity than the skills and capabilities being developed. Although developing well, the use of assessment strategies has yet to become firmly embedded in all lessons; where assessment strategies are not fully utilised, this is slowing down the pace of learning. Furthermore, many students struggle to articulate coherently what they are learning using the correct terminology.
- Teaching assistants ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able to participate and contribute as well as their peers.
- Students use ICT successfully to work independently using a wide range of programs. This also enables students who are absent from school, for example because of illness, to undertake important aspects of work and revision remotely.
- Although the school has not formally introduced the teaching of functional skills, most students demonstrate that they already posses these skills up to Level 2.
- Students would welcome less repetition in the work they are required to do and would like more opportunities to show and share their work with others during lessons.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Although the quality of the curriculum has significantly improved and now meets the needs and interests of students more appropriately, the offer is quite narrow and has yet to impact fully on raising standards.
- The specialist status has enabled the school to significantly improve the quality and range of ICT facilities available to all students and all departments. Plans have correctly identified the benefits of further investment in handheld technology and some additional laptops.
- The application of ICT in all subjects has raised the level of skills across the curriculum and is contributing to whole-school improvement. Science gained a DfES Innovation Award in 2006. Geography has developed a Year 9 course without textbooks.
- The way ICT is used to support the needs of the most vulnerable students ensures that these learners are provided with equality of access to the curriculum in a way that would otherwise not be possible.
- The ICT curriculum is well supported by the school's work in personal, social and health education and this contributes very well to students' knowledge and understanding of themselves, others as well as about government and legal issues.

Leadership and management of ICT

The quality of leadership and management of ICT is good.

- The clear vision for ICT in this Roman Catholic school is helping to prepare students as effective Christians in the modern world. This is because skills are taught within the context of ethical and responsible use and students' moral development.
- In the absence of a substantive head of department for ICT and as a result of staffing issues, one of the assistant headteachers has provided the department with strong leadership and support for the last year eighteen months. This together with the hard work and dedication of the two acting heads of department has enabled the school to make good progress from a very low starting point.
- Consequently the curriculum has been improved as have the quality of teaching and learning and standards are rising.
- There is very good support provided by the technician and network manager. This enables teaching staff to remain focused on their students as opposed to having to resolve technical issues.
- The work undertaken with the local feeder middle school has enabled students to arrive in Year 9 with a higher level of skill and a wider range of ICT experiences than was previously the case.
- The school monitors its e-safety policy rigorously and this has led to a significance reduction in the already low instances of internet misuse.
- Although the department has a generally accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses and these are used well to plan subsequent improvement, some aspects of self-evaluation are not sufficiently precise or evaluative. For example they do not precisely highlight the progress and outcomes for different groups of students.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment in ICT is good.

- The greater use of ICT has been of benefit to the department, the students as well as at whole school level. Consequently there is a level of rigour in the way students' progress is tracked and monitored throughout the school.
- Students are assessed after every unit of work and challenging targets are reviewed frequently.
- Teachers are making better use of assessment information to identify underachievement and target resources more appropriately. This is helping to accelerate progress especially where assessment strategies are used consistently well during lessons.
- Students know what they have to do to improve their work because they are given the time and the guidance to help review and evaluate their work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the quality of teaching of discrete ICT is more consistently good
- broadening the curriculum offer at Key Stages 4 and 5
- ensuring that self-evaluation in the department is more rigorous in its analysis of the progress and outcomes for different 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, local Learning and Skills Council and the diocesan board. It will be published on the Ofsted website and will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector