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Ms B Greenhalgh  
Headteacher  
Horndean Infant School  
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Dear Ms Greenhalgh

Ofsted subject survey: identifying good practice in information and communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 May 2009. The visit provided valuable information about your virtual learning environment (VLE), 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 without their consent.

The visit included discussions with you, your two assistant headteachers, the ICT leader, a member of the governing body and a teacher from the Early Years Foundation Stage. I also spoke to pupils in Years 1 and 2, observed the 'Megabytes' group using the VLE, scrutinised relevant documentation and looked at examples of pupils' work.

The school has developed its own VLE using a flexible and user friendly commercial package. Following months of preparation and training the VLE went live in November 2008. Although the school made a conscious decision to develop the use of the VLE over a two year period, the benefits are already evident.

Features of good practice observed

- The use of the VLE by all pupils in the school is helping to maintain high standards and outstanding progress particularly in reading, writing, mathematics and ICT.
- The VLE is making an excellent contribution to supporting the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills as well as their personal development and well-being. Pupils talk enthusiastically about what they are doing on the VLE and share and discuss ideas in a very

mature way given their age. They enjoy recording themselves singing, reciting poems, telling stories and adding commentaries to their work. They particularly appreciate listening to their recordings at a later date and sharing these with friends and family at home and at school. Vulnerable groups of pupils and those with speech and language difficulties are making good use of the VLE to support their needs and as a result they participate as enthusiastically as their peers to their work.

- In developing their individual home pages pupils are provided with good opportunities to be creative; they make choices about colours, fonts, content and texts.
- The VLE enables parents to view their children's work remotely; this has been welcome by parents who are absent or working abroad. Pupils are eager for their parents to see their work and this is contributing to raising their self-esteem and confidence.
- You work extremely hard to ensure that staff, parents and pupils are all well informed about the need to use the VLE safely, how to do this and the consequences if they do not. Parents are only provided with a user name and password once they have signed an agreement about the acceptable use of the VLE in front of a member of staff.
- Adults and pupils can access on-line activities via the VLE to help them check their knowledge and understanding of using technology safely.
- Every class has developed its own page on the VLE. These pages generally include the use of images as well as colour text and large icons to facilitate access to the site even for those who are as yet unable to read. The pages also include information about the work currently being covered in English, mathematics and science and some pages have simple animation for example, to introduce work related to growing plants.
- Teachers have provided good demonstration lessons to pupils about how to use the VLE and this has enabled pupils to work with increasing independence for example, in uploading digital stills and completing tasks on line. This provides good opportunities for pupils to work independently while developing and applying a range of skills particularly in ICT, English and mathematics. Pupils use blogs as a means of producing diary entries; they also use shared forums to contribute and share opinions and ideas.
- Boys who were previously less enthusiastic about undertaking writing activities have become keen to write if they can use the computer and then show their work to others using the VLE.
- Work has become even more purposeful for pupils because they know it will be displayed on the VLE.
- Teachers are able to use the VLE to provide work which is more specifically tailored to the different needs and abilities of pupils. A good example is the provision of work at different levels to help pupils learn their letters and sounds and practise calculation skills and problem solving in mathematics.
- Pupils in Year 2 created good quality presentations about their visit to Marwell Zoo. They were very excited about the prospect of writing

about their favourite animals and uploading pictures because they knew their work would be shared with others.

- Older pupils in Year 2 are beginning to develop their e-portfolios as a way of keeping an electronic record of their accomplishments.
- You have recognised that pupils' understandably low level of typing skills can at times reduce the pace of learning; consequently, from the age of four pupils are taught how to type.
- Teachers are able to mark and assess pupils' work remotely as well as when they are at school. However, feedback to pupils when done using the VLE is at times too brief and not of the high quality usually found in pupils' books. This reduces the impact of marking in helping pupils to recognise what they have done well so they continue to do it and what they can do to improve.
- The VLE does not include samples of work that have been levelled as a way of exemplifying standards.
- The informed use of the VLE is facilitating cross-curricular links for example in Year 2 with pupils using ICT to support their work in history, drama and science about space exploration. The digital stills accessible through the VLE provided a good additional record of pupils work.
- The school is beginning to integrate the use of mobile and handheld technology to make best use of what is currently available on the VLE. However, pupils are not fully independent in their use of peripheral equipment.
- Subject leaders have ICT included within their remit and this includes identifying appropriate websites for pupils to access. The school is currently updating its matrix that identifies links between subjects, but has yet to include links which include the use of the VLE.
- The school's action and improvement plans although good do not yet identify how different groups of pupils will benefit from the use of the VLE. Furthermore, the impact of the VLE has yet to be evaluated. Nevertheless, the VLE is contributing well to the school's equalities policy by improving access to the curriculum especially for vulnerable groups.
- The staff and governing body have a clear vision for embedding the use of the VLE in the school.
- The VLE is contributing extremely well to the school's efforts to develop a closer working partnership with parents to further support pupils' learning. This is because it has improved links between home and school and is providing greater levels of communication. It has also been used very well to raise the profile of the governing body for example, the chair of governors has produced a quiz for pupils.
- You have ensured that all staff have received high quality training tailored to their individual abilities and needs. This is enabling all staff to make effective use of the VLE.
- The VLE has been extremely well designed and is very user friendly. It is similar in terms of style, layout and colour to the school's static website. This has helped it to have a familiar look and feel for staff, pupils and parents. The school has created much of the content and makes effective use of links to other helpful and relevant sites.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that assessments done on the VLE are of an equally high standard to those done using more traditional methods
- including examples of levelled work on the VLE as a way of helping to exemplify standards
- ensuring that action and improvement planning identifies intended outcomes of the use of the VLE for different groups of learners
- measuring the impact of the VLE.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the use of the VLE in the school. As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier  
Her Majesty's Inspector