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Dear Mr Hill

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 24-25 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 interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, a tour of the school and observation of two lessons and two part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is good. Standards reached by the end of Key Stage 4 are above average.

- Students enter the school with standards in ICT which are broadly in line with the national average. However standards in literacy are lower than national average which impacts on the students' ability to access some conventional ICT resources such as websites. At the end of Key Stage 3 students reach standards which are broadly in line with the

national expectations. This means that during Key Stage 3 students make satisfactory progress.

- By the end of Key Stage 4 students reach standards which are above the national expectations. Therefore students make good progress during Key Stage 4 and from Year 7 to Year 11. The vast majority of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.
- Higher attaining students are challenged well at Key Stage 4. They are given the opportunity to take additional qualifications, which the students appreciate. They are also given the opportunity to liaise with local businesses to solve ICT problems.
- However at Key Stage 3 the higher attaining students are not as well challenged. You have recognised this and are planning strategies to enhance their progress, however it is too early to judge the impact of these strategies.
- Students are aware of the need to stay safe when they are using new technologies and what they need to do to stay safe. You have enhanced their knowledge and understanding through assemblies, enrichment weeks and lessons. You have acceptable user policies in place and these are signed by the students and their parents.
- Students use the ICT equipment responsibly. They treat the equipment with respect and are prepared to take turns when using laptops. The students enjoy using ICT, and especially appreciate the opportunity to take short films on school trips and have them displayed on the interactive whiteboard in the dining room.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They know and understand the requirements of the courses they are teaching. Key ICT terminology is used in all lessons and students are expected to know and understand ICT terminology.
- Demonstrations in lessons were clear and well structured.
- In the lessons observed teachers and teaching assistants worked well together and this supported the students' progress.
- Lessons are well planned and use a variety of resources. However some of the examination resources used can limit the amount of progress the higher attaining students make: this has been recognised and higher attaining students at Key Stage 4 are challenged through links with local businesses.
- In some lessons students use ICT independently. For example in an 'opening minds' lesson (your integrated programme in Years' 7 and 8), students were given open ended tasks and were able to structure their work in conjunction with other students. They were set the challenge of producing two resources, one ICT based and one not. The work was linked to RE and the Islamic religion. In this lesson the students worked very well together and ICT supported their learning well. However in some lessons students were very much directed by the teacher and had fewer opportunities to use ICT to learn independently.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- In Year 7 and Year 8 students receive their ICT entitlement through your integrated programme. This enables the students to apply their ICT skills and capability to different subjects and gives the students realistic scenarios for the use of ICT. For example, students were taught, in one lesson observed, how to use complex searching to find reliable web sites concerning global warming. This work also linked to the students' work in English where they had been looking at plagiarism.
- In Year 9 students receive an hour a week of ICT. This develops the students' knowledge and understanding of spreadsheets and databases. The work links to the Year 7 and Year 8 curriculum and that done at Key Stage 4. Students also complete ICT work across the curriculum using computer aided design and computer aided manufacturing in technology and work on programming in mathematics.
- In Key Stage 4 all students study ICT for at least one hour a week. The means that all the students receive their statutory entitlement to the National Curriculum. In addition to this the specialist arts' status enables the students to use ICT in a variety of ways. These including opportunities to produce radio programmes with a commercial radio company.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are good.

- You apply the four principles of best value. In particular you take much time to consult with the students to ensure that the resources you purchase are appropriate for them. Students have also been involved in designing an ICT room.
- You have taken the ICT resources to the students by providing laptops and net books. These, combined with the interactive whiteboards around the school, mean that ICT learning is integrated into everyday classroom practice.
- The ICT departmental self-evaluation is an honest and accurate document. It clearly highlights areas for development. The self-evaluation is linked to the ICT development plan. This document details how outcomes for students will improve.
- There is an e-safety policy which has been agreed with the governors. All students, parents and staff sign an acceptable user policy for when they are using new technologies.
- You have put in place some training for staff. This has focused on ensuring that staff are able to use your virtual learning environment. However the training has been on a demand basis and is not systematically planned.

Use of Assessment

Assessment is good.

- All students have challenging targets for ICT.
- In Key Stage 3 students' work is assessed against set criteria. Staff make a comment about the work and then set targets for the students. However the targets tend to be generic rather than specific and this means that not all the students know exactly what they need to do to improve. You are aware of the issues with assessment in ICT at Key Stage 3 and are in the process of reviewing it.
- At Key Stage 4 the assessment is completed using your virtual learning environment. The students appreciate this as they can upload their work and complete it at either school or home. As one student commented "there is nothing to lose" because the work is on the computer. The assessment is focused on the work the students need to do to complete their course. Some of the assessment is very detailed and give the students very good guidance, however not all the assessment is as helpful.
- Most students are able to review and evaluate their work in ICT.
- Much ICT work is completed across the curriculum. The work the students do is not always assessed according to ICT criteria and it is not fed back to the ICT department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- challenging the higher attaining students at Key Stage 3
- putting in place a systematic ICT training scheme for all staff
- ensuring that ICT assessment is developed and co-ordinated across the school.

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

Tanya Harber Stuart
Her Majesty's Inspector