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Mr D Daniels
Principal
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Dear Mr Daniels

Ofsted survey inspection programme – information and communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit, with Angela Corbett HMI, on 6 and 7 October 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 use of ICT to support learning in other subjects.

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 12 part lessons.

The academy is in its fourth year. The oldest students at the time of the inspection had just begun Year 10. The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is satisfactory.

- The academy evaluates students' ICT skills during their first few weeks after admission. This shows attainment on entry to be broadly average. The Key Stage 3 programmes of study are condensed into two years so that students start studying for Key Stage 4 qualifications a year earlier than normal.

Standards attained by the oldest students at the end of their last complete academic year (Year 9) were average. Therefore, the progress they made since joining the school was satisfactory.

- Assessment data show that the attainment of younger year groups is higher in some aspects but not all. Where students in Year 8 use ICT to communicate and present their ideas, standards are generally above average. However, standards in programming remain average and standards in data logging are low because it is not currently taught.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities were seen to make good progress in a literacy lesson through working with microphone headsets and software which enabled them to hear the correct pronunciation of words, record themselves speaking the words and to see how those words are spelt. Hardware is modified for students with disabilities to ensure they can access the curriculum.

Quality of teaching of ICT

The quality of teaching of ICT is satisfactory.

- Teachers have sound subject knowledge and classroom management is good. They prepared a range of imaginative tasks and resources which engaged students well and developed their skills and understanding of key concepts. However, too much reliance was placed on learning presentations which were primarily teacher led. As a result, teachers spent too much time talking about concepts and skills rather than modelling or demonstrating them in ways that students would easily grasp. This, in turn, meant students spent significant amounts of time on the same learning activity regardless of their differing starting points.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the ICT curriculum is satisfactory.

- All students have one lesson of ICT a week taught by an ICT specialist. For older students, this leads to a functional skills qualification and a vocational qualification. Around one third of older students choose to study additional vocational qualifications. There is good provision for students to use ICT to communicate and present their ideas and to manipulate data using spreadsheets and databases. There are satisfactory opportunities for students to develop their programming skills but students have had no experience of using sensors to log their own data at the academy.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management of ICT is satisfactory.

- ICT resources are made widely available to all subject areas and students like to make use of them. All teachers are encouraged to use ICT to improve learning in their lessons. However, the use students make of ICT in other subjects is not mapped or assessed. Consequently, the ICT team are unaware

of how well students are able to use the skills they have taught them and teachers of other subjects are unclear about just what students are capable of doing.

- The acting head of ICT has shown considerable initiative. Although relatively inexperienced, she has quickly evaluated provision and identified aspects of the curriculum that need more emphasis. Teaching and learning are improving as a direct result of her drive and determination to develop consistency and good practice. She provides ICT with a good capacity to improve.

Subject issue: the use of ICT to support learning in other subjects

- ICT is used well in some lessons, such as mathematics, to provide work of differing challenge to students. In other lessons, like design and technology, the use of ICT enables students to visualise the objects they would like to create, whether or not they have the practical skills to draw or manufacture them. The use of 'blogs' in history involves parents and other students in evaluating each others' homework tasks which are published online.
- Teachers do not always consider sufficiently how the use of ICT within their lessons will enable students to learn more effectively beyond merely using the technology to present their work well. Sometimes, students become too engaged in refining the presentation of their work which distracts them from the intended subject learning for the lesson.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring all aspects of provision get equal emphasis by providing opportunities for students to use sensors connected to computers and to develop their programming skills
- improving teaching by modelling or demonstrating basic concepts in simple ways
- coordinating, mapping and assessing the use of ICT across the curriculum to ensure it is used to improve learning in other subjects and so that students' achievements are known to all.

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 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