

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr A Cliffe
Headteacher
Brine Leas High School
Audlem Road
Nantwich
Cheshire
CW5 7DY

Dear Mr Cliffe

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: information communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 4 and 5 November 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 included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is good.

- Students' capabilities in ICT are evaluated during their first few weeks in the school. These assessments show attainment on entry to be broadly average. Students make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 3 to attain average standards by the end of Year 9. All Key Stage 4 students take a short course in GCSE, with some opting to take additional vocational qualifications in ICT. Students' attainment in the GCSE course is above average. This means that students' progress from the start to the end of their time in the school is good.

- All Year 11 students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are entered for the GCSE course and in 2009 every student passed. Careful monitoring, mentoring and extra support enables students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make the same good progress as other students.

Quality of teaching of ICT

The quality of teaching of ICT is good.

- The teaching seen ranged in quality from outstanding to satisfactory.
- In the best lessons, teachers used their excellent technical knowledge to plan challenging activities that motivated students. There was a good balance of whole-class teaching and opportunities for students to work independently. This enabled the higher-attaining students to explore and develop their mastery of some more difficult skills.
- Where teaching was satisfactory, this was because the lesson proceeded at a slower pace. Sometimes the work set for the students was too easy and this limited their achievement.
- Teachers' assessment of the work completed in ICT lessons is excellent.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The programmes of work are balanced well to ensure students have good opportunities to progress in all aspects of the National Curriculum. There are plentiful opportunities for students to use ICT to communicate and present their ideas and to use spreadsheets and databases to model and problem-solve.
- The ICT team has developed imaginative ways of helping students acquire programming skills. In one activity, students watch a video clip of the car-chase scene from 'The Italian Job' and then attempt to replicate how the robbers manipulated the traffic lights in their 'get away'. Students do this by programming a software simulation of the traffic lights from the film.
- There is outstanding provision for e-safety. Students learn how to keep themselves safe online, how to keep their personal computers safe from unwelcome interference and about how to conduct financial transactions on the internet securely. In a 'Phishing Impossible' topic, students use videos and simulations to develop their understanding of how email and websites can be faked to trick the unwary into unwittingly revealing their financial details. Parents are informed well about this provision so that they can ensure their children follow the guidance at home too.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

Leadership and management are good with outstanding features.

- Self-evaluation is excellent and gives the school a clear picture of its strengths and weaknesses. These inform strategic planning which is

concise and tightly focused on prioritising actions, the cost of those actions and the precise impact those actions are expected to have.

- The ICT infrastructure is managed well and has been thoughtfully developed so that students and staff can access their work, the school's learning resources and use the school's software from home. This means the investment in software resources is available even when the school is closed, providing good value for money. However, younger students generally make less use of these facilities to improve their learning at home than older students.
- There is a strong trend of improvement in provision and correspondingly in the standards students are attaining. The school has a good capacity to improve in ICT.

The use of ICT to improve learning in other subjects

The use of ICT to improve learning in other subjects is good.

- ICT is used widely by other subjects to improve students' learning. Video technology is used well to train teachers in classroom management and to help students studying a sports leader qualification to understand how body language can be used in coaching.
- Although students' use of ICT in other subjects is sometimes assessed, this is not regular and systematic. This means the ICT team are only partly aware of how well students are able to apply the skills they have taught them elsewhere.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- systematically assessing students' use of ICT in other subjects
- ensuring more students make use of the school's ICT resources to improve their learning at home
- improving the overall quality of teaching to match the best seen.

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

David Anstead
Her Majesty's Inspector