3 February 2010

Mr R Northcott
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Dear Mr Northcott

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10 and 11 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; joint observations of 10 part-lessons; and accompanied short visits to another eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is good.

■ Students' ICT attainment on entry is broadly average.

■ At Key Stage 3, students make good progress and achieve results above the national average. Assessment data and scrutiny of work indicate that the school accurately assesses the students' National Curriculum levels.

- All students study for, and achieve, a qualification in ICT by the end of Key Stage 4, in line with the school's ambition to prepare all students well for their future economic well-being. Around a quarter of students follow the full GCSE and these students make good progress to achieve above-average results. The remaining students all follow an ICT course equivalent to between one and four GCSE grades. Most work for the single award and almost all achieve a distinction. For many, this reflects outstanding progress in the presenting, communicating and handling information aspects of the ICT curriculum covered by the course. However, the progress made in the data logging and programming aspects of the ICT curriculum is weaker. Progress overall, between Years 7 and 11, is good.

- In the sixth form, all students studying advanced level computing make good or better progress. Those studying advanced level ICT make satisfactory or better progress. Overall, progress in the sixth form is good.

- ICT is used well to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who make good progress.

- Students' knowledge and understanding of how to use the internet safely is outstanding because it is promoted continually, in ICT lessons, through school assemblies and across the curriculum.

Quality of teaching of ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Teaching focuses on developing students' independent and confident use of ICT. Learning is scaffolded well but, at times, is too teacher driven which can slow the pace of learning for more able students. Good use is made of ICT to support learning. Lessons are planned well with tasks that successfully engage students, although they are not always sufficiently adapted to meet the needs of all students.

- Assessment is ongoing in lessons and students continually receive advice on how to improve. At Key Stage 3, recently introduced systems for more formal monitoring and assessment are beginning to provide students with clearer feedback on how to improve their ICT capability. In the sixth form, highly refined systems of feedback support students' achievement well and they achieve highly in their projects.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

- All students in Years 7 to 11 have at least one lesson of ICT a week, taught by an ICT specialist. At Key Stage 3, all aspects of the ICT curriculum are covered either through ICT lessons or other subjects. Key Stage 3 culminates in a week-long cross-curricular-based ICT experience, covering design technology, English, media, music and science. This

provides the opportunity for students to demonstrate and extend their ICT capability.

- At Key Stage 4, although students are taught at least once a week, for the large majority this teaching does not cover all aspects of the ICT National Curriculum. While all students experience data logging through science and gain experience of programming across the curriculum, it is not formally assessed.

- In the sixth form, a small proportion of students follow A-level courses in ICT and computing. However, ICT is used extensively by all students to support their learning in other subjects.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- There is a clear vision and high ambition for students to become confident users of ICT and apply it across all subjects to raise achievement. Senior leaders provide strong strategic direction and daily management of ICT resources. While ICT subject provision and performance are reviewed regularly, the process is not always sufficiently rigorous and linked systematically to steps for improvement.

- The computing aspect of the school's specialism has a significant impact, particularly in terms of ICT provision to provide a more inclusive curriculum. For example, the use of computers and professional mixing software in music is engaging students and raising their achievement.

The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects

The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects is satisfactory.

- ICT is used very widely across the school and is seen as an essential learning tool to visualise key concepts and bring learning alive, in particular through animation, video clips and practical activities. For example, students were able to make significant gains in their understanding of product design through the use of computer-aided design software. In an English lesson, a poem was brought to life when it was read by the poet to a set of inspirational video clips, enabling students to interpret its meaning.

- All teachers are confident users of ICT. They are particularly skilful in their use of interactive whiteboards, and encourage and support students to share their ideas and thoughts with the class. Teachers have an excellent understanding of when it is appropriate to use ICT and when it is not. Students' use does not just focus on the presentation of work; the specialism has enabled the development of the use of specialist software and hardware, such as for film editing, to broaden their experiences.

- Students' use of ICT across the curriculum is not mapped or assessed. As a result, the ICT work that students do in other subjects does not contribute to their overall ICT capability assessment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all students at Key Stage 4 receive their full entitlement to the data logging and programming aspects of the National Curriculum
- planning lessons to make sure that teaching and learning activities are matched well to students' abilities
- developing a systematic approach to mapping and assessing the use of ICT across the curriculum.

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

Angela Corbett
Her Majesty's Inspector