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Mr D Pridding
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Dear Mr Pridding

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 18 and 19 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 improve 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of 11 part-lessons and a tour of the school with students.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is satisfactory.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement is satisfactory.

- Students' capabilities in ICT are evaluated when they join the school through a sophisticated diagnostic assessment tool which covers all aspects of the ICT National Curriculum. Although students' standards in using ICT to communicate and present their ideas are broadly average when they join the school, the diagnostic assessment shows standards in other aspects of ICT such as handling data and programming are exceptionally low.

- The same diagnostic tool is used to assess and monitor students' progress through Key Stage 3. It shows that by the end of Year 9, the majority make approximately double the progress expected nationally. Standards have improved to be broadly average at this point.
- However, the outstanding progress made at Key Stage 3 is not sustained at Key Stage 4 because the curriculum does not allocate sufficient time. Those students choosing to study extra ICT attain above-average standards because of the good teaching they receive and because they have an appropriate number of lessons. However, most students make only satisfactory progress and standards by the end of Year 11 remain broadly average.
- Students studying applied ICT or Computing qualifications in the sixth form have attained variable results in the last few years. There is some evidence that these are beginning to improve.
- Considering the variations in progress and standards between different year groups, overall achievement in ICT is satisfactory.
- Behaviour in lessons and attitudes to learning are excellent. Students are happy, well-motivated, help each other and treat their ICT resources with respect.

Quality of teaching of ICT

The quality of teaching is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and good classroom management skills.
- Students get regular feedback about the quality of their work. This means that they are aware of their current levels of attainment and can mostly explain what they need to do to improve their work.
- Teachers make very good use of assessment information to plan activities of varying difficulty appropriate to students' differing starting points.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- Greater time is given to ICT at Key Stage 3 than is normally the case. This allows students to rapidly gain ground in those aspects of ICT where they were behind at the start of Year 7. At Key Stage 4, most students have insufficient time for ICT and this limits their achievement. Although all aspects of the National Curriculum are just about covered, opportunities to develop skills in some aspects, such as programming, are minimal.
- The school offers qualifications in ICT and computing in the sixth form in line with its specialist status. Around four times as many boys as girls take ICT post-16.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management is good.

- Good self-evaluation means the school has a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. A recent review has already identified the need to increase the curriculum time for ICT next year.
- High expectations and careful monitoring of provision are responsible for clear trends of improvement. The capacity to improve is good.

The use of ICT to improve learning in other subjects

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

- ICT is often used by students to improve the presentation of their work. In some subjects, it greatly improves the quality of learning. In an outstanding music technology lesson, students used professional-quality recording software to edit and sculpt the sound in ways that just would not be possible without modern technology. In other lessons, online tests were used effectively to quickly check students' understanding and to increase the variety of tasks. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities were very well engaged and motivated through demonstrating their understanding of problems on an interactive whiteboard and through writing online 'blogs'.
- Although the school has mapped where ICT is used to improve learning in other subjects, this needs updating. Some subjects provide samples of work to show how students have used ICT but in the main, students' use of ICT in other subjects is not systematically assessed. Consequently, the ICT team is largely unaware of how well students can apply the skills they have taught them elsewhere.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards and participation levels at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form by:
 - providing more time for ICT in the curriculum at Key Stage 4
 - building progression routes to increase the take up of ICT qualifications in the sixth form by girls
 - assessing students' use of ICT in other subjects.

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