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Ms Barron
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Dear Ms Barron

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 9 and 10 December 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; a tour of the school with students; a visit to the diploma suite; and observation of nine part-lessons, two of which were joint observations.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is satisfactory.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is satisfactory.

■ Students' ICT attainment on entry is broadly average. At Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress and achieve results in line with the national average. All students study for a qualification in ICT in Key Stage 4. For most students, this course is equivalent to one or two GCSE grades. The majority of students make at least satisfactory progress and achieve in line or above expectations. For many, this reflects good progress in 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 and therefore progress overall between Years 7 and 11 is satisfactory.

- In the sixth form, very few students follow an ICT or computing-related course each year. Almost all who do make satisfactory or better progress.

- Students with special education needs and/or disabilities receive good support and so make progress similar to their peers in ICT.

- Students' knowledge and understanding of how to use the internet safely are good because it is continually promoted across the school, for example in ICT lessons and through a whole-school challenge day.

Quality of teaching of ICT

The quality of teaching of ICT is good.

- Teachers have good ICT subject knowledge. Lessons are planned well with tasks that successfully interest and encourage students to use ICT independently. Learning is supported well with regular reviews of progress and key learning points through well-targeted questioning. However, on occasions teachers do not sufficiently challenge the most able or provide opportunities for group or paired work. ICT is used well to support learning, for example, through whole-class demonstrations and online help sheets

- Assessment is ongoing in lessons and all students continually receive both written and verbal advice on how to improve. Recently improved systems to monitor and assess students' progress at Key Stage 3 include good opportunities for them to reflect on their own learning in each of the half-termly modules.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

- All students at Key Stage 3 and 4 have at least one lesson of ICT each week, taught by an ICT specialist.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been revised to fully meet the needs of the new programme of study. Students' knowledge and understanding of ICT are enhanced by a range of experiences across the curriculum, including data-logging in science and computer-aided design in design technology.

- At Key Stage 4, although all students are taught ICT, teaching focuses primarily on the communication, presentation and data-handling aspects of ICT. While all students experience data-logging through science and programming across the curriculum, these aspects are not formally assessed. New opportunities for learning about programming are being introduced for the current Key Stage 4 students.

- Very few students in both Years 10 and 11 are following the new ICT Diploma course, which is taught over two days each week.

- In the sixth form, a few students follow an A-level course in computing or the new ICT diploma. Students use ICT well 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 drive for students to become confident users of ICT which is seen as an essential tool to raise achievement across all subjects. Leaders at all levels are increasingly effective in reviewing both students' performance and provision in ICT. As a result, clear actions are being taken to improve, for example, training in the use of new software or strengthening the weaker aspects of ICT provision such as programming.

- Students' enjoyment and success to date in the new ICT Diploma course reflects its successful implementation as a result of good management.

- The computing aspect of school's specialism impacts significantly across the school, particularly in terms of the profile of ICT as a subject and its use across the curriculum. Access to ICT is excellent with teaching timetabled into ICT rooms in several subjects, including English and mathematics. Although there are opportunities for students to participate in projects both in and out of school, the range of courses for students at Key Stage 4 in ICT or computing is limited. In particular, there are few opportunities to challenge the most able.

The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects: satisfactory

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

- ICT is used very widely across the school and it is seen as an essential learning tool to help visualise learning, in particular through practical work, animation, and video clips. For example, in an English lesson, an online spider diagram and then images of Sherlock Holmes helped students to develop their understanding and the impact of the stories. In a mathematics lesson, learning accelerated because time was saved when students used a remote mouse palette to very effectively explain and share their answers.

- Teachers recognise the impact of using ICT to support students' learning and have a good understanding of when it is appropriate to use ICT and when it is not. Students' use of ICT does not just focus on the presentation of work. The specialism has significantly enhanced provision in terms of both access to and use of specialist software and hardware. ICT is used well to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities across the curriculum. For example, reading and writing software that develops both their literacy and independence in learning.

- Students' use of ICT across the curriculum is identified in terms of activity. For example, the use of graphical calculators in mathematics and software for presentations in history or data analysis in geography. However, these are not linked to the different levels or aspects of ICT. Consequently, 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:

- giving equal emphasis to all aspects of the National Curriculum by increasing the provision for programming at Key Stage 4
- finding ways to increase curriculum choice in ICT at Key Stage 4, in particular for the most able
- developing a systematic approach to coordinating, mapping and assessing students' use of ICT when working 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

Angela Corbett
Her Majesty's Inspector