05 March 2010

Mrs Lewis
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Lewis

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 9 and 10 February 2010 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; observation of eight lessons; and a tour of the school with students.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is inadequate.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is inadequate.

■ Students' capabilities and knowledge of ICT are evaluated when they start at the school. These assessments show attainment on entry to be below average. Students make good progress during Key Stage 3 to attain standards that are broadly average by the end of Year 9. Standards at Key Stage 4, for those students taking a vocational qualification, are average meaning they too have made good progress from when they joined the school. However, a significant proportion of older students choose not to study ICT and make inadequate progress at Key Stage 4 because they do

not have opportunities to progress further after the end of Key Stage 3. Overall, achievement is inadequate.

■ Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe when online and of how to protect the security of their personal and financial data. They are unsure about how computer viruses are transmitted and how best to protect their personal technology from infection. They say they would like the school to teach them more about this, as well as about how computers work.

■ Behaviour and relationships are good. Appropriate modifications are made or additional support provided for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

■ Where ICT is taught as a subject, teaching is consistently good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and classroom management skills and establish good relationships with their classes.

■ Good assessment is a feature of all ICT lessons. Students are very clear about their current level of performance and what they need to do to improve. Assessment information informs the planning of differentiated tasks.

■ However, the need to complete a large amount of coursework in limited time means that lessons sometimes lack opportunities for students to share their ideas in more depth and for teachers to ensure the underlying concepts are clear. As one girl said: 'We are taught the course requirements but do not always have an overall understanding of the concepts'. She went on to explain how she had struggled to transfer a series of steps she had been taught at school to a different software package, even though they were designed to do the same task.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is inadequate.

■ An innovative 'life skills' curriculum for Key Stage 3 is being introduced as the previous 'legacy' curriculum is being phased out at Key Stage 4. The new curriculum places the use of ICT at its heart so that it underpins students' work in other subjects. Students' use of ICT in other subjects and assessment opportunities and progression pathways are mapped in unusual detail.

■ Provision for older students who do not choose to study ICT as one of their option subjects is inadequate. Although students have opportunities to use ICT in other subjects, this aspect of their work is not mapped, coordinated or assessed, with the result that they make inadequate progress. ICT National Curriculum statutory requirements for these students, who are following the legacy curriculum, are not met.

- There is an overemphasis on using ICT to communicate and present ideas and insufficient opportunities for students to develop their use of spreadsheets, databases, programming skills and data-logging equipment.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in ICT is satisfactory.

- The school is aware of the deficiencies of the legacy curriculum and plans are already being implemented to tackle the shortcomings. The new curriculum is ambitious and embodies the school's vision for the place of ICT as one of three 'life skills'. The strong trend of improvement, evident in the Key Stage 3 test results and in the Key Stage 4 results of those who take an ICT qualification, indicates the good capacity to improve.
- ICT resources are managed well and the principles of best value are applied in ensuring that the school obtains value for money from its investment.
- Staff training needs are audited annually and good arrangements are in place to ensure they receive the individualised support they need.

## The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects

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

- A large number of laptops, connected through a wireless network, enables ICT to be widely used in other subjects. In a music lesson, good use of sequencer software was seen. The variable tempo control on the software and the wide range of pre-recorded 'loops' enabled students to record a melody line and to create a backing track whether they could play a keyboard or not. However, ICT is mostly used by students for communicating and presenting their ideas with only limited uses of, for instance, spreadsheets and databases across the curriculum.
- Teachers of other subjects are beginning to assess students' use of ICT as part of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum but this is not yet secure and does not extend to the legacy curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring the statutory ICT National Curriculum is provided for all students
- providing a more balanced curriculum with more opportunities for students to develop their skills in data-handling and programming
- extending the assessment of students' use of ICT in other subjects to all years so that the ICT team are aware of how well students are able to apply the skills they have learnt elsewhere.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ICT in the school.

As I explained previously, 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