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12 February 2010

Mrs S Martin
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Martin

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 2 and 3 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; and observation of 10 lessons and six short visits to other lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is satisfactory.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with levels of attainment in ICT which are broadly in line with the national average. During Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress and they develop ICT skills and capabilities in line with those found nationally, although few attain the higher levels. Most also achieve the equivalent of one GCSE pass grade by the end of Year 9. At Key Stage 4, all students continue to follow an accredited ICT course. The course was revised in 2009 to provide a greater breadth of study. As a result of this and the improved student monitoring, progress improved and the large majority now attains the equivalent of three GCSE passes. At both key stages, students make good progress in developing their communication, presenting and modelling skills. However, their progress in programming and data-logging skills is only satisfactory.

- In the sixth form, students' attainment is improving and is now in line with the national average. Progress has improved over the last three years. All students make consistently satisfactory progress and, for an increasing number, progress is good.
- The majority of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because they are supported well and taught in smaller ICT classes.
- Students' are independent users of ICT and their knowledge and understanding of using new technologies are good. There is a team of trained 'cyber mentors' from Years 8 to 10 to help support any student who is bullied either off or online.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. At Key Stage 3, lessons are planned well with tasks that interest and encourage students to use ICT independently. At Key Stage 4, teaching focuses on coursework. In these lessons, the pace can be slow and learning activities are less varied.
- The quality of questioning to assess or promote learning is variable. Teachers too often accept short responses and do not develop the dialogue or involve all the students in the class. While students are given opportunities to work independently, in some lessons their learning is not sufficiently extended to fully meet their capabilities.
- Students receive effective feedback both verbally, and in writing, on how to improve their work. Written feedback is stronger in the accredited ICT course and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

- At Key Stage 3, students receive one ICT lesson a week taught by an ICT specialist. In Year 9, students begin to study for an ICT qualification; this, together with work covered in Years 7 and 8, meets the needs of the new ICT National Curriculum. The accredited ICT qualification course at Key Stage 4 includes database, spreadsheet and animation units but opportunities to develop programming skills at the highest levels are limited. In Year 10, the curriculum now offers students the opportunity to take alternative courses including Functional Skills, European Computer Driving License (ECDL) and a full GCSE course.
- The schemes of work for each year group provide a sound basis for teaching. However, there is little detail on how work meets the needs of differing ability groups. As a result, teachers do not always provide activities to extend the most able.
- In the sixth form, students follow an applied ICT course and the numbers opting to take these courses are rising. All sixth-form students are given extensive opportunities to use ICT to develop good independent learning skills which they use well to support their learning in other subjects.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

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

- All staff view ICT as an essential tool to raise achievement. Accurate self-evaluation of both the students' performance and provision in ICT has identified key areas for development. Well-focused actions are already improving outcomes for students.
- The technology specialism has contributed to the good provision of equipment across the school to support students' learning. New developments are made in line with the shared vision for new technologies to support 'any time, any where' learning. For example, mini laptops have been purchased for sixth-form vocational courses and for those students without access to ICT at home.

Subject issue: 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 widely across the school. Interactive whiteboards are available in most classrooms and teachers use them well to enhance learning through prepared resources including games and video clips.
- There is good access to computers. Their use in other subjects increases as students move up the school. When students do use ICT, they make use of a reasonable range of different types of software, including software for designing in technology, data-handling in geography and composition in music. However, the majority of use involves communicating and presenting information. The use of ICT in other subjects is audited annually but the work completed by the students is not assessed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing a systematic approach to assessing students' use of ICT when working in other subjects
- improving the schemes of work and teaching to meet fully the students' differing learning needs
- improving the use of questioning to promote students' learning and increase the pace of lessons.

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