

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



28 January 2010

Dr G Holden
Headteacher
Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School
Maidstone road
Rochester
Kent
ME1 3EL

Dear Dr Holden

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 18 and 19 January 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; a tour of the school; and three 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 above average. During Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress in the development of their ICT skills and capabilities. They make better progress in the communication and the presenting information strands of the ICT National Curriculum.
- At Key Stage 4, the students following an accredited ICT course make satisfactory or better progress and levels of attainment at the end of Year

11 in 2009 were above average. The progress students make is enhanced because of the challenging targets the students are set and the thorough monitoring of these targets. However, these students at Key Stage 4, as at Key Stage 3, make much better progress in developing their communication skills. Their skills and capability in aspects such as data-logging and programming are weaker.

- Similarly, students who do not follow an accredited ICT course at Key Stage 4 make satisfactory progress. This is because they have numerous and varied opportunities to develop their ICT skills and capabilities across the curriculum. However, although their progress is mapped, rigorous and systematic monitoring of individual progress is not well developed.
- Sixth-form students studying A-levels usually reach levels of attainment above the national average. In 2009, however, some students did not reach these high levels of attainment and, given their starting points, made inadequate progress. This was recognised by the school and strategies were put in place to remedy it. As a result, the large majority of students in both Years 12 and 13 now make good progress. Overall, progress in the sixth form is satisfactory.
- The few students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress, and some of them make good progress.
- Students' knowledge and understanding of how to use the internet safely are outstanding. This is because internet safety is continually promoted across the school. While access to the internet is filtered, it is adjusted in response to appropriate requests from students to meet their learning needs.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is satisfactory.

- Teachers' have sound subject knowledge. This is used to plan lessons well and to develop good resources which meet the needs and interest of the students. In lessons, students have opportunities to work in groups and individually. Peer-assessment is also a strong feature of teaching. However, in some lessons teachers do not refocus learning quickly enough, and at these points the pace is slow.
- Students are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning in lessons. Most notably, they set their own targets for their progress in coursework lessons. However, although this is developing their independent learning skills, some of the targets do not always fully challenge the students and this means that they make only satisfactory progress in lessons. In particular, the more able are not always sufficiently challenged to ensure they make better than satisfactory progress.
- Verbal assessment in lessons is good. Effective questioning helps the students to know what they need to do to improve their work. This good verbal assessment is backed up by pertinent written assessment.

Unfortunately, this is not reflected across the school for those students who do not study ICT at Key Stage 4.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

- At Key Stage 3, students receive one ICT lesson each week, taught by an ICT specialist. The curriculum has been adapted recently to meet both the requirements of the new ICT National Curriculum programme of study and the needs and interests of the students. Although statutory requirements are met there is more of a focus on the communication and presenting information strands and less on programming, sequencing, control and modelling. This is limiting the students' overall progress to satisfactory.
- At Key Stage 4, those students studying ICT take overall responsibility for their learning. They are given the opportunity to personalise their learning and develop their ICT interests by choosing which units to study.
- Those who do not study an ICT accredited course have numerous opportunities to use ICT and develop their ICT skills and capabilities across the curriculum. These opportunities also enhance the ICT education of those students who do study for an accredited ICT qualification. However, although these opportunities are mapped, rigorous and systematic monitoring is not in place which means that not all students are helped to make better than satisfactory progress.
- In the sixth form, ICT courses are offered each year but the take up varies considerably. However, all students in the sixth form are given extensive opportunities to use ICT to develop their independent learning skills and support their learning in other subjects.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

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

- Staff at all levels are highly committed to broadening provision and promoting the use of ICT to increase achievement and raise attainment in all subjects.
- Recent and accurate self-evaluation has led to key areas for development being identified. Although there is a well-focused action plan which is already impacting on improving outcomes for students, quantifiable goals and monitoring milestones are not clearly indicated.
- The vision for ICT is that it will support and enhance 'any time, any where' learning: this is being developed through the careful and well-planned implementation of the school's virtual learning environment.
- The school's specialist status in computing is impacting well. In particular, the good ICT resources and numerous staff training opportunities mean that ICT is used effectively to support learning.

The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects

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

- ICT is seen as an integral part of teaching and learning in all subjects. ICT is used very effectively across the school and provides many opportunities for developing the students' creative skills and their ability to work with others. For example, students worked enthusiastically and responsibly to produce a pod-cast about food in Spanish and movie presentations in geography on the Haiti earthquake. As a result of these opportunities, they become independent and confident users of ICT.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment and improving achievement, particularly for the more able, by:
 - giving equal emphasis to all aspects of the National Curriculum by increasing the provision for programming, sequencing, control and modelling at Key Stages 3 and 4
 - providing more challenge in lessons
 - rigorously and systematically monitoring and tracking students' progress, particularly 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