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Dear Ms Evans

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 4 and 5 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; joint observation of seven lessons; and a tour of the school with Year 8 students.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is inadequate

Achievement in ICT

Attainment in ICT is low and achievement is inadequate.

- In 2009, Year 11 students who studied ICT reached levels of attainment which were significantly below the national average. Although this year group did enter the school with below average attainment, this still represents inadequate progress during their time at the school. The vast majority of students who did not study ICT at Key Stage 4 made no measurable progress at all between Year 9 and Year 11. This inadequate

progress in ICT at Key Stage 4 has been happening for the last three years.

- Students in Year 11 in 2010 who study ICT are making better progress. This is because of changes to the curriculum and improvements in teaching. Students are also making better progress in Key Stage 3, with more students achieving Level 5 and above, but progress overall in Key Stage 3 is still inadequate.
- About 40% of students in Year 10 and 11 do not study ICT. These students do not receive their full statutory entitlement for ICT and their progress and attainment are inadequate.
- Students have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe when using new technologies. They have received lessons on this topic in both ICT and other subjects across the school and there are assemblies on this subject too.
- In the majority of lessons seen, the students' behaviour was at least satisfactory and sometimes outstanding.

Quality of teaching of ICT

The quality of teaching of ICT is inadequate.

- ICT teachers have the subject knowledge needed to teach and assess the courses offered. Planning in the lessons seen was variable. The better planned lessons used the school's planning sheet and in these lessons progress was better.
- In the good ICT lessons seen, the students worked more independently, supported by resources which they found useful and were linked to assessment data. In these lessons, behaviour was better and the students were more focused on their work.
- Students following ICT courses have target levels and grades for ICT and they are aware of what grade or level they are working at. In ICT lessons, assessment has improved recently but it is still too variable between the key stages. For example, assessment is having more impact in Key Stage 4 because it is more frequent. Assessment is particularly effective in Year 11 examination groups who are now making better progress. Assessment is good in Year 7. However, in Year 8 and Year 9 students' work is not marked and they have little idea of their current levels of attainment and no guidance on how they might improve their work. School leaders are unable to track student progress through these years and so do not know who is doing well and who is making inadequate progress. Although the use of assessment is better in other year groups, overall it is inadequate.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is inadequate.

- The curriculum has recently been changed because of the inadequate progress that students studying ICT at Key Stage 4 were making. The

alternative courses are enabling students to make better progress in those elements of ICT which they study.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is much improved. The themed units are interesting and enjoyable and the students receive their full entitlement to the statutory ICT National Curriculum. The curriculum in Year 7 is innovative, well organised and monitored.
- However, overall the curriculum overall is inadequate because 40% of Key Stage 4 do not receive their entitlement to the statutory ICT National Curriculum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is inadequate.

- Leadership and management are inadequate because of the lack of awareness of the statutory requirements of the ICT National Curriculum and because targets are not set for pupils who do not study ICT in Key Stage 4.
- Portfolios of evidence of students' work are not kept at Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4. As a result, sampling and monitoring processes, for example to moderate students' progress towards their targets, are cumbersome and difficult in Key Stage 3 and impossible in Key Stage 4.
- However, many positive changes have been made in ICT over the past 18 months, driven by improved and determined leadership. For example, low attainment is being tackled and more challenging targets are in place, but only for students who study ICT. Also, there have been improvements in the frequency and accuracy of assessments in Key Stage 4.
- Serious staffing problems in ICT have contributed to problems in the past. However, you have taken decisive steps to improve the leadership, capacity and quality of the teaching in the subject. A new subject leader has very recently been appointed, who, with the support of an enthusiastic and developing ICT team, is improving the progress students are making.

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 across the school in all subject areas and is leading to improved provision and student participation. Students are able to use ICT frequently in lessons and can, when appropriate, choose to use it if they prefer to work in this way. There is good provision of equipment and the recent investment in laptops is particularly beneficial.
- In a good media lesson seen, laptops were used in the classroom to design newspaper front covers to reflect a particular bias. The use of the laptops improved the ownership and quality of students' work. This, in turn, motivated the students to engage fully in the lesson and enabled them to make good, and in some cases, outstanding progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring all students receive their statutory entitlement to the ICT National Curriculum
- enabling all students to reach higher levels of attainment and make at least satisfactory progress
- coordinating and assessing the students' use of ICT, particularly 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 will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Cliff Mainey
Additional Inspector