1 April 2011

Mrs J Fletcher
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Fletcher

**Ofsted** 2010−11 **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 22 and 23 March 2011 to look at work in ICT.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons, including two observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

**Achievement in ICT**

Achievement in ICT is good.

■ The students begin in Year 7 with levels of attainment which are at or below the national average. By the end of Year 9, they are achieving in line with national averages and by the end of Year 11 are above national averages. For example, the pass rate in terms of Oxford Cambridge and RSA (OCR) Nationals is good. Students' average points score for ICT is well above the school average. Achievement is also good in the sixth form. Across the school, students therefore make good progress with some making outstanding progress.

■ Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported to achieve well both in mainstream and special classes. The good quality

of teaching and support from teaching assistants means that they make at least good progress.

- Students behave very well in ICT lessons and their response to each other and to the teachers is mature. They listen to each other and work well either in groups or independently. The relationships between staff and students when using ICT are excellent.

- Students are supported to learn how to become safe and responsible users of new technologies through assemblies, follow-up work and with specific ICT study modules. The impact of this teaching on the students' understanding of e-safety is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good by the end of Key Stage 4.

## Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- All teachers of ICT and those who use ICT in their teaching do so confidently. ICT specialist teachers have good subject knowledge and particularly good understanding of the schemes of work or course specification that the students are following. This allows them to plan lessons which engage and motivate the students. Lesson planning is detailed although sometimes the learning outcome is defined too much in terms of task rather than what it is the student is expected to understand or learn. Some weaker teaching focuses too much on skills development, but much of the good or outstanding teaching has features that promote rapid student progress. For example, teachers make students aware of what it is they need to do to achieve a level and, crucially, what is needed from them to get to the next level.

- Questioning is good. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on 'testing', students were challenged to improve their ideas by carefully targeted and differentiated questions. Differentiation by task is good.

- Students are supported well in developing their independent learning skills when using ICT through paired, group and independent working. They are generally confident about using new technologies. However, opportunities are missed to develop students' literacy skills because there is a lack of focus on the meaning of key words and some concepts in ICT.

- The assessment of ICT work is excellent in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Assessment for learning is outstanding, as is the focus on target setting, monitoring and intervention. As a result, almost all students achieve their challenging targets. Students know what they have done well and what level/grade they are on. The individual support that students receive in lessons is very good.

## Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

- All students received their entitlement to the statutory ICT National Curriculum. However, it has been recognised that this does not provide enough challenge in Key Stage 3, especially in the areas of web technologies and media, so a new compressed curriculum for Years 7 and 8 has been designed for implementation in 2011, together with all students beginning either a core ICT course or OCR National in Year 9. The planning for this is very good and takes into account the students' needs, together with what is on offer from the new facilities in the building schools for the future (BSF) programme.

- Students' opportunities to enhance and embed their ICT skills are carefully mapped across all subjects. However, there is no recent audit of staff understanding or skills to inform the continuing professional development needed to help staff deliver ICT across the school in the new building.

**Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT**

Leadership and management in ICT are outstanding.

- ICT is very well led at all levels, both at departmental and senior management level. There is a clear, shared, understanding of the strengths and areas for development. Much progress has been made since September 2010. Monitoring of the work of the department is regular, accurate and leads to carefully targeted improvements. The improvement plans are excellent, taking into account a range of sources of evidence and clearly focusing on the impact on students' achievement. As a result, over the past three years, students' attainment has risen and achievement increased. There is a well-constructed programme of provision to meet the BSF build.

- The use of data to raise standards and improve provision at both student and department levels is excellent. It impacts significantly on students' achievement and has led to precise plans for curriculum improvement. A range of external staff is being used effectively to support the development of ICT, including a consultant and the local authority (LA) ICT specialist; partnership with the LA to support improvement is impressive. Overall, strategic leadership of ICT is excellent.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- assessing the impact of individual curriculum modules on students' attainment in Key Stage 3

- ensuring that attention is paid in every lesson to the key ICT vocabulary students need to know and understand

- auditing and developing all teachers' ICT knowledge and understanding to inform a comprehensive plan for their professional development.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely


**John Williams**
**Additional Inspector**