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Mr A Smith  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Smith

**Ofsted 2011–12 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 15 and 16 November 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 six lessons, including three which were observed jointly with you and the two assistant headteachers.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good and improving.

**Achievement in ICT**

Achievement in ICT is good.

- Students enter the school in Year 7 with ICT standards that are above national expectations. By the end of Key Stage 3 their standards are also above average; a significant proportion achieved level 6 in the last teacher assessments and only a few achieved level 3. In 2011, those who were entered in Year 11 for a national vocational award attained excellent results by gaining distinctions; this represented approximately half the year group. However, the other half of the year group did not follow an ICT course, nor were they assessed. Currently, all Key Stage 4 students follow an ICT accredited course and over 80% are on target to achieve a distinction. Those following Diploma courses such as in construction, business or sport attain good standards in ICT functional skills.

- Students achieve well across the whole of the programme of study for ICT and have particular strengths in aspects such as multimedia. The design and technology department contributes well to students' attainment through, for example, an electronics course. Across the school, students make good progress; in part this is due to the many and varied opportunities provided for them to apply their ICT knowledge, skills and understanding in other subjects.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well. This is because they receive good support in lessons from learning support assistants. The more able make sound progress but a lack of differentiation or challenge at times limits their achievements.
- Students are taught how to become safe and responsible users of new technologies through the ICT curriculum, assemblies, visits from the community police and their personal, social, health and citizenship education (PHSCE) programme. The impact of this teaching on the students' understanding of e-safety is good.
- Students' behaviour in ICT lessons or when using ICT is good and often outstanding. When given the opportunity, they demonstrate that they are independent yet cooperative, and can work well together. They have well developed speaking skills and talk with confidence and accuracy. The relationships between students and between staff and students when using ICT are excellent.

### **Quality of teaching in ICT**

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- The quality of teaching in ICT is good; it is better in lessons where teachers are using ICT in their subjects than in ICT subject-specific lessons. In the latter, teachers plan carefully lessons that are matched to the curriculum and sometimes choose interesting tasks to achieve the learning outcome, though these outcomes are not consistently shared with students. ICT teachers understand the examination and assessment criteria very well. However, much is teacher directed and controlled which means learning is sometimes slow. When there is a lack of group or paired work opportunities to develop literacy or students' independence are missed.
- There is consistently good and sometimes outstanding use of ICT in other subject lessons, both by teachers as a tool to teach or by students as a means to learn. Teachers use imaginative presentations, often with video, that engage students. ICT allows them to teach in a way that would otherwise be very difficult to do. Portable netbooks and other ICT technologies are used effectively, for example in modern languages to access speaking software, or in geography to provide students with the opportunity to make informed decisions about how they wish to use ICT. In science, the use of video cameras challenges students to achieve at a high level, and in music access to a small suite of appropriate composing software promotes high standards. Design technology teachers use computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) very well, for

example in electronics, so that students are able to make objects to professional standards. This good teaching using ICT is replicated in many areas across the school.

- The assessment of ICT focuses well on assessing students' understanding and not just their skills. Even though students' work is often assessed in ICT terms in other subjects such as science, these data are not fed back to inform the overall assessment of students' ICT capabilities. Target setting is a very strong feature of the school that promotes high standards. Students understand the level at which they are currently working and know what they have to do to achieve the next level.

### **Quality of the curriculum in ICT**

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is satisfactory.

- The taught ICT curriculum is satisfactory in both key stages although the Year 7 course does not build on Key Stage 2 achievements. Many students are independent and creative learners but at present the ICT curriculum is not contributing fully to the aims of the school in promoting these features. There is a focus from the outset on providing a curriculum that allows students to achieve well in an external examinations by the time they are in Year 11. At the time of the previous inspection there was a weakness in that not all Key Stage 4 students were receiving their ICT entitlement. This has been addressed swiftly and all students now follow the OCR National Award.
- Students benefit from seeing teachers using ICT in many other subjects and they have opportunities to apply their ICT in these lessons. This is not coordinated fully, which means that teachers are not aware of the ICT knowledge, skills and understanding that students bring to their lessons. As yet, the new virtual learning environment (VLE) is not having the impact that it could have on the curriculum because it is at an early stage of development. The school is aware of this and the importance of developing this further.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is good.

- Leadership and management of ICT are good. They are better at whole-school strategic level than at ICT subject level. ICT is a small department with teachers who try hard to provide their best for the students. However, the department's self-review is inaccurate in some areas, for example it overestimates students' achievement and some of the judgement criteria have been misunderstood. There is a general lack of use of data in its self-evaluation. Consequently, the improvement plan does not give a sharp view of what needs to be done to improve.
- Whole-school strategic planning is, however, much better. The use of ICT to set and monitor students' targets across the school is very good and is well embedded. The monitoring of the work of the ICT department is regular and accurate. The whole-school improvement plan addresses ICT

very well in terms of how it contributes to the school aims and all teachers understand the clear improvement plan. It is linked to a good and sustainable programme of resource allocation. The infrastructure to support teaching and learning in ICT has been improved steadily over recent years and is now good. The impact of ICT professional development is good and everyone now has one ICT performance target, demonstrating a commitment to improving ICT.

- Overall, management and leadership show good capacity to improve even further.

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

- improving ICT self-evaluation and development planning
- focusing ICT teaching on developing students' independence, creativity and learning skills
- developing the VLE further as a tool for teaching and learning
- building on existing good practice in using ICT across the school by mapping students' experiences and assessments to provide full coverage of ICT.

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

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

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