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Mr R Whittall
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Whittall

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 28 and 29 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 eight lessons, a significant number of which we observed together.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is outstanding.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is outstanding.

- Attainment by the end of Year 11 is good in terms of GCSE results. This represents excellent progress because students begin school in Year 7 with attainment that is mostly below or well below national averages. End of Key Stage 3 results have steadily improved over the last three years and are now in line with national averages. Progress is outstanding in ICT lessons because of the excellent teaching and challenging curriculum. Students are creative and imaginative, showing well-developed understanding of ICT and transferrable skills. A high percentage of students on role have special educational needs and/or disabilities and progress very well because they receive excellent support from teaching assistants as well as other learners. Students work extremely well

together, listening to each other and building on each other's ideas. Those with special gifts and talents are provided with many opportunities to achieve the higher levels in all aspects of ICT.

- Students' behaviour and response to teachers and their peers are excellent. They have well-developed learning skills, are articulate and highly enthusiastic about ICT. E-safety is taken very seriously and much emphasis is given to this from the day students begin, through modules in the ICT curriculum, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons and assemblies. Consequently, students have a well-developed understanding of how to stay safe using technologies.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is outstanding.

- ICT teaching has many outstanding features. The subject is taught mainly by two teachers who work together to make sure students achieve very well. Learning outcomes are displayed in every lesson; unusually and effectively teachers often make students of all ages read these aloud, making students explain them to ensure that they are fully understood. Teaching is based on outstanding relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves. Consequently, gentle humour is often used to create a vibrant working atmosphere. Teachers' subject knowledge and how to teach ICT subject knowledge are outstanding; there is a sharp focus on developing students' understanding and not just their skills. Consequently, students acquire excellent transferable skills. Errors and misconceptions are dealt with extremely well as the lesson progresses.
- Teachers take every opportunity to use technical language and to develop further students' general literacy skills through a variety of whole-class, group and paired work, with sometimes the student taking up the teacher role. Assessment for learning is thorough and effective; target setting is valuable in that students know the level at which they are working and what they need to do to attain the next level. Summative assessment is carried out regularly, but the ICT work that students do in other subjects is not yet used to inform their overall assessment in ICT at the end of each year.
- There are two outstanding features of lessons where teachers use ICT to teach or students use ICT to learn, namely the use of peer- or self-assessment, and the way in which students are empowered to make decisions about their ICT. Consequently, students discriminate extremely well about what ICT to use to achieve the objective. They are expected to provide and take constructive criticism of work, and they thus develop high self-esteem and self-confidence.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is outstanding.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is imaginative and up to date, linking to the National Curriculum programme of study in a creative way. Interactive and extended projects, including topics such as e-safety, animation, web-design, sequencing and control, provide opportunities for students to acquire a depth of understanding of ICT.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is well thought out. The functional skills element is interpreted well to provide challenge and interest as well as develop students' personal and social skills. Students say that they enjoy the content of the curriculum. The timetable is very unusual in that it provides opportunities for those in Years 10 and 11 to study ICT for a whole day in mixed-age classes. This is extremely effective; students say that they really enjoy this way of working and it helps them make progress.
- A variety of ICT courses is on offer in the sixth form, including a recognised networking qualification. A high number of students now choose to study ICT in the sixth form which is leading a number of them to choose to study ICT in higher education. Above all, the curriculum across the school provides opportunities to meet students' individual needs and some very creative timetabling arrangements support this.
- All ICT-related courses are enhanced by partnerships with Warwick University and with local industry, including some summer internships for sixth formers. ICT is well used by teachers of other subjects and students have many opportunities to embed their ICT skills and understanding. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is beginning to support students' learning. However, the school is aware that it does not as yet provide systematic opportunities for all students to access their work or communicate electronically from outside school.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is outstanding.

- There has been a clear improvement in standards over three years. The teaching of ICT and the quality of the curriculum are excellent. The subject is very well led; the induction of a new head of department has been effective. This is a small department where teaching is having a major impact on students' learning. The role models the teachers provide for students, especially girls, means that there has been a big increase in uptake in the sixth form. Younger students are already excited about their opportunities to study an aspect of ICT further.
- The ICT development plan and whole-school plan are well thought out. Monitoring of teaching and learning is regular and accurate. Teachers show a remarkable openness and self-criticism in school self-evaluation, demonstrating a real desire to improve or maintain high standards.
- The strategic plan for ICT is understood by all. The last-minute withdrawal of Building Schools for the Future funding has not de-railed management in its aims to put ICT at the heart of learning. Consequently, there is no issue with access to ICT at the point of learning. The infrastructure to support this is reliable and the plan for its development appropriate.

- The school has demonstrated, and continues to demonstrate, outstanding capacity to maintain or improve ICT.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- bringing together the assessments of students' ICT capability in all subjects to inform the overall judgement about ICT
- developing the VLE further to support the work students do at home as well as at school.

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.

Yours sincerely

John Williams
Additional Inspector