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Mr R Skelton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Skelton

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: information and communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 22 and 23 May 2012 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 two groups of students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of seven lessons including two observed jointly with school leaders.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is outstanding.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is outstanding.

- Students begin in Year 7 with ICT skills well below those expected for their age. Different groups of students make consistently outstanding progress as they move through each key stage and leave the school with attainment broadly in line with the national average. Students were observed engaging very well in learning. They are highly enthusiastic users of new technologies in ICT and in other curriculum areas.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make very good progress because staff have a thorough understanding of their needs. Consequently, they receive high-quality support during ICT lessons.

- Students use ICT creatively and imaginatively in subjects across the curriculum. Their very good progress is supported by excellent links between home and school. Parents and carers are able to access students' work on the school's web-based learning platform. One student proudly said, 'my parents are often amazed by the work they see.'

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is outstanding.

- Teachers use assessment systems highly effectively to monitor in detail the progress that students make over time in each key stage. Teachers' assessment skills in individual lessons are also consistently strong. As a result, their plans for the next stages of learning very accurately meet the needs of different groups of students and ensure the right level of challenge. In some lessons, students use hand-held remote voting devices to submit answers to teachers' questions. This enables teachers to assess and re-shape learning. Students were observed considering their answers carefully and enjoyed using the devices.
- Outstanding teaching quality over time secures students' outstanding progress. Teachers ensure that lessons run at a good pace to maximise students' learning opportunities in the time available. Teachers' marking and feedback, both written and verbal, are of high quality and make a strong contribution to students' learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they use ICT skilfully in other subjects to ensure that it makes a significant impact on learning. For example, in the modern foreign languages department, students often work in a sound-proofed room to record, listen to and improve the quality of pronunciation. However, teachers' skills in using the school's expanding range of software and hardware are not audited as frequently as they could be. This means that staff training opportunities are not always targeted directly to meet individual staff needs. Teaching assistants make a very strong contribution to learning in other subjects, for example by preparing and circulating electronic resources.
- The school's learning platform is used very effectively by teachers to support teaching and learning. ICT resources used in lessons are often made available for students to access at home, and this successfully reinforces and deepens their understanding.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is outstanding.

- All students at Key Stage 3 receive their entitlement to the statutory ICT National Curriculum during ICT lessons. Year 7 students cover ICT as part of an effective integrated learning and thinking skills programme. However, the school acknowledges that transition arrangements between Key Stages 2 and 3 could be improved, so that teachers have a better understanding of students' ability in ICT when they begin the school.

Students are well prepared when they begin ICT vocational courses in Key Stages 4 and 5.

- An increasing proportion of students leave the school at the end of the sixth form to follow an IT-based course into higher education. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the curriculum in preparing students very well for the future and their next steps of learning.
- ICT is used very effectively to support learning across the curriculum, particularly in science and in technology. In these subjects, an excellent range of resources, including thermal imaging equipment and a comprehensive range of technical design software and machinery, excites and inspires students and adds vibrancy to learning. A number of well-established international links, supported strongly by ICT, also add breadth and variety to the curriculum.
- Students demonstrate a very well-developed understanding of e-safety because there is significant curriculum coverage, including frequent assemblies. A range of e-safety posters and displays is positioned around the school and resources are placed on the school's learning platform. One student commented that she had been able to support her younger sister and parents in developing their understanding of e-safety by using the school's resources on the learning platform.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT is outstanding.

- You and other senior and departmental leaders communicate high ambition, determination and enthusiasm successfully. This inspires all staff to achieve very well. Leaders have a clear vision for ICT and this is communicated very effectively with all stakeholders.
- Access to IT equipment is outstanding, as a result of careful planning and the functional layout of the school's modern building and facilities. Resources are very well managed and maintained.
- Partnerships with others are very strong and make a significant impact on strengthening provision and achievement. For example, one partnership enables local residents to receive free broadband access. This has significantly increased learning opportunities for students, as most are now able to access the school's learning platform and continue to learn at home.
- The school's very strong track record of achievement in ICT indicates an outstanding capacity to continue to improve.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing precision in shaping the Key Stage 3 curriculum to meet students' changing needs, by improving ICT transition arrangements between Key Stages 2 and 3
- enhancing the development of non-specialist ICT staff skills by auditing skills more frequently and targeting training with increased rigour.

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

Jeremy Spencer
Her Majesty's Inspector