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Dear Mrs Trigger

Ofsted survey inspection programme of secondary schools:
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3-4 December and Clive Barnett HMI on the 4 December to look at work in ICT. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of ICT, the visit had a particular focus on the impact of the ICT curriculum on students' achievement.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of fifteen part lessons and one assembly.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in ICT are outstanding. The changes to the leadership and management of this subject as well as an outstanding curriculum and good teaching have led to rapid improvements in ICT over the last couple of years.

- Students join the school in Year 7 with a range of ICT skills which are broadly average. They make good progress in Key Stage 3. The rate of progress increases in Years 10 and 11 which enables all groups of

students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, to make excellent progress and achieve high standards by the end of Key Stage 4.

- The excellent tracking and monitoring of students enable the school to set challenging targets which are reviewed and updated at regular intervals. These are shared with students to ensure they know what they need to do to attain the next level.
- Students develop a wide range of capability. This enables them to apply their ICT skills in a range of subjects and contexts. They are able to do this independently and are encouraged to make choices about the most suitable applications to support their learning.
- The school's use of ICT has had a significant impact on improving students' attitudes to learning and enhancing their personal development and well-being. This is evident in students' enthusiasm during lessons, their ability to work successfully together and the respect they display towards each other and towards staff.
- The progress that students make in developing their ICT skills is helping to raise their aspirations and increase their skills and self-confidence. This is leading to more students than is the case locally and nationally, remaining in education, employment or training when they leave school.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is good with outstanding features.

- The school has provided teachers with good in-house training and development opportunities. This has led to teachers demonstrating a good level of subject knowledge and increased levels of confidence.
- The great majority of lessons observed were good and some were outstanding, such as a music lesson involving compositions including layers of synthesised music to accompany a video game. These students used ICT creatively to improve their use and understanding of tempo, dynamics, texture and timbre.
- The school has invested heavily in providing most classes with interactive whiteboards (IWB). This has enabled teachers to develop a more interactive approach to teaching with a stronger focus on learning.
- In only a minority of lessons did teachers ensure that all students had the opportunity to respond to questions.
- Planning identifies good progression of skills and appropriate links to real life experiences and learning in other areas. However, the quality of planning is not consistently good and there are, at times, insufficient planned opportunities for challenging higher attainers.
- There is excellent provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which includes specialist teaching which makes use of ICT extremely well to also support learning across the curriculum. As a result these students make extremely good progress and develop pride in their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- The school has modified its ICT curriculum several times in the last few years. It now has an excellent curriculum in place which caters for students of all abilities and enables them to use ICT innovatively in other areas of learning.
- All heads of department have ICT included within their remit and this is helping to develop the use of ICT across the curriculum, although this has yet to be firmly embedded in the core subjects and in design and technology.
- Data logging and modelling are included within other subjects, for example in science; however, the school currently has limited access to these resources and borrows equipment from another school.
- The creativity project, which linked the performing arts with science, was enriched through the additional application of ICT. As a result students were able to increase their level of exploration of sound and light and record their findings digitally and produce a video of their performance.
- Units of work in ICT are modified to take account of students' prior knowledge; this is leading to a greater level of personalised learning.
- However, the use of ICT is not sufficiently explicit in all cross-curricular planning. Furthermore, teachers are not making sufficient use of the information about students' capability when planning for the integrated use of ICT in other subjects.
- Students are beginning to develop e-portfolios. They think this is a useful way of storing examples of their work.
- The investment in hardware and software has ensured the needs of all students are carefully considered and planned; although the school still needs to improve levels of access to ICT across the curriculum and further increase resourcing of ICT for students with additional needs.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management of ICT are outstanding.

- The staff work extremely well as a team. They are committed to raising standards, ensuring that every child matters and that the needs of all students are extremely well catered for.
- You and your leadership team, working with middle leaders, have helped to ensure that the school has a clear vision for ICT, which is understood and embraced by staff, governors, students and parents.
- The governors have been very supportive of the school's efforts to improve the quality of provision. This has led to an increase in resourcing and a sharp focus in raising standards. The governing body fulfils its duties of acting as a critical friend extremely well. Governors are very good at holding the school to account to ensure excellent value for money.

- The leadership make extremely good use of ICT for whole school planning and to help set challenging targets for all students.
- There is extremely good monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and the progress students make. Any underperformance is rigorously challenged and additional provision and support is put in place for those students at risk of underachieving.
- The evaluation of ICT is of high quality and demonstrates an excellent knowledge of strengths and areas in need of improvement.
- The school has yet to ensure that improvement plans for core subjects include sufficient reference to ICT as a strategy to help raise standards in those areas.
- The school recognises the value of developing additional links with outside agencies including local businesses and industry.

Subject issue - the impact of the ICT curriculum on students' achievement

The ICT curriculum is having a good and improving impact on students' achievement.

- ICT is having a positive impact on raising standards by enhancing the quality of teaching; however, its impact on learning is not equally good in all subjects, particularly in the core. Nevertheless, the application of ICT is leading to outstanding achievement in music, geography, photography, the performing arts and in vocational studies.
- As a result of their ICT skills students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able to access the curriculum with greater ease and confidence. This enables them to develop as independent learners and has provided them with more freedom to express themselves and be creative than would otherwise be possible.
- Students use ICT to increase the rate of their learning and improve the quality of their work in an increasing number of subjects. Good examples were observed with the use of voting pads for students to identify correct answers in science and history. There was also a particularly good example of students being able to view a film clip using hand held technology. This helped them to consider carefully the use of colour and light in the film; this then spurred them on to produce good written work.
- The use of ICT by teachers and students in modern foreign languages has led to increased levels of interest in languages and high levels of motivation in these lessons.

Inclusion

The subject's contribution to the inclusion of students is outstanding.

- ICT is an integral part of the school's inclusion policy.

- This is an inclusive school that takes extremely good care to ensure that all students are able to access the full range of ICT learning activities.
- ICT is very well used to engage and motivate disaffected learners and the benefits of this are particularly evident in the improved achievement and attendance of some students in Year 9.
- Lower attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress by the end of Year 11 because they feel valued and respected. Teaching is carefully tailored to the needs and interests of students and makes excellent use of ICT to improve attitudes to learning and help all students become successful learners.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- ensure that improvement plans for the core subjects include sufficient reference to ICT as a strategy to help raise standards
- embed structured talk activities in lessons, to help all students participate as fully as possible and have a secure understanding of what is expected
- ensure planning includes sufficient information about the intended learning outcomes for the higher attaining students and provides consistently good levels of challenge
- continue to improve levels of ICT resourcing for students with additional needs and further improve students' access to ICT across the curriculum
- ensure the school is in a position to anticipate future developments and practice by developing additional links with outside agencies including local businesses and industry.

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 and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector