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Dear Mr Reeves

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13-14 March 2008 to look at work in ICT.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of assessment.

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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, the observation of six lessons and an informative tour of your school with two senior students.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement and standards in ICT are satisfactory.

- Students join the school in Year 7 with above average skills in ICT. By the end of Year 9, their standard of attainment is well above average representing good achievement.
- Achievement during Years 10 and 11 is broadly satisfactory but varies according to the course followed. The average GCSE points score achieved by students on the applied GCSE course is much lower than the school's average and improving this is a key focus within the school's strategic improvement plan. However, within this broadly satisfactory picture, there are many examples of outstanding work,

particularly although not exclusively in relation to digital media and web design.

- Students' achievement is boosted in many subjects through effective use of ICT. In particular, very good use is made of the Eco centre by science, geography and mathematics for data logging, weather tracking and video conferencing.
- Students' personal development is good. Students behave well and work hard. When ICT is being used in lessons, students' show a high level of interest and enthusiasm. However, whilst students work with confidence and a growing level of independence, not enough opportunities are given for students to reflect upon or plan their own learning.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning of ICT is satisfactory.

- Specialist ICT teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and this leads to clear, well planned, focused lessons, which are appropriately challenging for all students.
- Whilst lessons are never less than satisfactory, few opportunities are given to students to reflect on their learning or test their understanding against challenging learning objectives.
- Teachers' questions are too closed and focus largely upon recall of knowledge, rather than challenging students to think for themselves or justify/evaluate their work.
- At Key Stage 3, students are less enthusiastic about their ICT than those studying the subject at Key Stage 4. This is because some of the teaching is quite routine, which, whilst effectively delivering the curriculum, tends to lead to a formulaic approach which is less engaging for students.
- Whilst work is always marked at the end of assignments, in some year groups there is insufficient feedback given to students week by week, and, as a result they do not know how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum for ICT is good.

- The rapidly developing virtual learning environment (VLE) is enhancing the curriculum. Students now have access to curriculum materials from home and many take advantage of the subject forums to support their learning. The facility within the VLE for students to use subject journals to record their progress and receive teacher assessments is helping to develop their independent learning.
- All students follow a discrete programme of ICT that leads to a wide range of accredited courses by the end of Key Stage 4 and the Sixth form. However, there is some overlap for students who follow more than one ICT course at Key Stage 4 which can lead to ineffective use of student time.

- The Eco centre is an excellent curriculum resource. Subjects such as science use ICT within the centre to measure thermal energy transfer, and geography uses the video conferencing facilities to take part in an innovative 'e-Mission' challenge.
- The use of ICT within other subjects is good. ICT features in all subjects and as a result of the effective training given by ICT staff, teachers and support staff make good use of the available resources.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- There is a clear vision for the development of ICT which all staff share.
- The department is well managed and effectively led, and as a result, there have been improvements year on year in the school's ICT provision.
- Developments in the subject are thoughtfully implemented and corrective action is currently being taken to raise standards.
- Self evaluation is not sufficiently focused on the impact of teaching and learning, and a more rigorous approach to monitoring is needed to ensure greater consistency across all teachers and year groups and hence raise achievement.
- Good technical support is ensuring the ICT infrastructure is robust and supports students' learning.

Subject issue - the impact of assessment on students' achievement in ICT

Assessment in ICT is satisfactory.

- Assessment varies from very good to barely adequate.
- In Year 11, students' progress is very carefully monitored and tracked by teachers and students are involved in assessing their own work against clear criteria.
- In Year 7, for example, assessment is weak. This is because whilst students are assessed at the end of each term's unit of work, there is precious little feedback week by week, and as a result students do not know how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve.
- Students are given challenging targets in all years, but with the exception of Year 11 where monitoring is very rigorous there is limited follow up and intervention for those students who are underachieving.

Inclusion

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

- Staff work hard to ensure that most students benefit from ICT experiences that prepare them well for their future education or employment.
- Students from the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit join mainstream classes and receive effective support.

- Lesson plans often provide extension activities for students.
- The curriculum meets the needs of all students and the development of the VLE is increasing access to learning materials for all.
- Additional ICT provision such as a 'girls only club' ensure that all students have good access to ICT.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that lessons are more engaging, challenging and provide opportunities for students to reflect upon and evaluate their own learning
- increasing the frequency and quality of formative assessment so that students know precisely how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
- increasing the rigour of self evaluation with a particular focus on teaching and learning.

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

Geoff Hancock
Additional Inspector