04 December 2008

Mr J Dryden
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Dear Mr Dryden

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2-3 December 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 and observation of seven part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is inadequate. Standards are below average.

- Students enter the school with ICT skills which are broadly in line with national expectations. Their skills in the presenting information and communication strands are much stronger than their skills and capability in control, spreadsheets and databases.
- By the end of Year 11 students reach standards which are below those expected. This means that between Year 7 and Year 11 students make inadequate progress in ICT. In particular the students capable of attaining the A*-A grades do not make the progress they should with many of them achieving grades well below those they are capable of.

- Students enter and leave the sixth form with standards which are broadly in line with the national average. Overall, in the sixth form, students make satisfactory progress. However there are indications that students' progress is improving, particularly in the Applied ICT Double Award A level.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported in lessons by teaching assistants. However because of a lack of formal ICT training often these members of staff are learning the skills at the same time as the students they are supporting. This hinders the progress that these students make, which is often inadequate.
- Some students work well when they are using ICT, they are prepared to help and support each other. However, often students were involved in low level disruption in lessons. This was usually when the teaching did not engage them.
- All students participate in an online safety module at the beginning of each year. In addition, in each year in Key Stage 3, students complete a more extensive piece of work about how to stay safe when using new technologies. This is reinforced through assemblies and links with outside agencies. Students spoken to were aware of the dangers they face when using the internet and were able to discuss how they kept themselves safe. The virtual learning environment (VLE) offers a safe way for students to highlight any cyber bullying. However you do not specifically monitor the incidents of cyber bullying.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning of ICT is inadequate.

- Too much of the ICT teaching and learning seen was inadequate. This meant that students made inadequate progress. In too many ICT lessons the students were all expected to do the same work. Often this work did not meet their needs and interests and this often meant that students became disinterested and engaged in low level disruption.
- In many ICT lessons students were asked to complete work they had already done. In some lessons students were working at very low levels and there was a lack of challenge. In some lessons students were told they were working at higher levels than they actually were. This gave students an unrealistic view of how well they were doing.
- In some ICT lessons seen the pace of the lesson was very slow, this meant students took advantage of the time they had and chatted about other subjects. Students, in some lessons, were very passive and did not engage with the work. In some ICT lessons the students completed the tasks set with little understanding of what they were doing or why.
- In the sixth form the teaching and learning in the ICT lesson seen was good. This is because the students were engaged in their work; they understood what they had to do and why they were doing it. The resources provided were good and motivated the students.
- The use of ICT to support learning across the school is good. In a PE lesson seen the students were highly motivated by the use of ICT to monitor their progress in a rowing race. This good use of the ICT

enabled the students to work in a team and individually. In a geography lesson the students were introduced to a new ICT program which they then used with confidence to describe and justify the geographical decisions they made.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The curriculum is inadequate.

- The curriculum is regularly reviewed after consultation with students and feedback from examination courses. This means that changes have been made, particularly in the sixth form, to ensure that the courses provided meet the needs and interests of the students.
- However at Key Stage 4 not all the students receive their statutory entitlement to the National Curriculum. They are not given the opportunity, for example, to complete work on control, data logging and sensors.
- The ICT work done by students in subjects other than ICT is not fed back to the ICT department. This means that the ICT department is unaware of what work the students are completing elsewhere. This leads to students repeating work in ICT lessons which they have already done in other subjects. This limits the progress the students make.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management of ICT are inadequate.

- You have in place a well developed, fully functioning VLE. This is developing teaching and learning across the school. It allows students to access their work at home and this is very helpful to those students who are off school ill. Staff and students appreciate the flexibility the VLE offers and the resources on it. Students feel they benefit from accessing all the resources from a subject rather than depending on the resources given to them in their lesson
- The ICT self evaluation is unrealistic. It does highlight areas for development but the grades awarded by the department are too high in all aspects.
- The ICT development plan is a list of tasks, there are no success criteria and there are no links to outcomes for students.
- You have started to audit what ICT equipment the school has. This audit has highlighted that you are facing a huge financial cost to either replace the equipment or replace the warranty.
- The PFI contract limits your ability to adopt the four principles of best value: challenge, compare, consult, competition.
- Until September 2008 professional development was offered and staff opted in, depending on what they felt their needs were. ICT professional development is now much more structured, and teaching staff appreciate what they have been offered.

- The school's specialist computing status has had a limited impact on ICT outcomes for students, particularly with respect to raising standards and improving progress.
- There has been much investment in ICT equipment. However there is little systematic evaluation of the impact of this investment on outcomes for students.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is inadequate.

- Much of the assessment given to the students is based on tasks they need to complete. There is little diagnostic assessment which identifies what the students have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- Some of the work was just ticked, with no comment made by the member of staff. Some assessment did not justify why marks had been given.
- The feedback given to the students is highly variable. It depends on which member of staff the students have.
- Very few of the students knew their target levels or grades. Those that did had little understanding of what their targets meant or what they needed to do to ensure they reached their target.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all students receive their entitlement to the ICT National Curriculum
- improving the quality of teaching and learning of ICT to ensure that all students make better progress
- developing the use of assessment to ensure that students understand their target grades and what they need to do to reach them
- developing the leadership and management of ICT to ensure that there is a clear focus on improving outcomes for students.

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

Tanya Harber Stuart
Her Majesty's Inspector