04 March 2009

Mr M Berrill
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Dear Mr Berrill

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Information and communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 23-24 February 2009 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 eight part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is inadequate. Standards are broadly average.

- Students enter the school in Year 9 with a wide range of ability in ICT, however, their standards are broadly average. This is because you have a large number of feeder schools and the different schools teach different skills and elements of ICT capability in Year 7 and Year 8.
- By the end of Year 9 students reach standards which are broadly in line with the national average, this means that the majority of students make satisfactory progress. However higher attaining students do not achieve the higher levels that they are capable of and some make inadequate progress.

- In Key Stage 4, in 2008, those students who took a GCSE in ICT made inadequate progress and reached standards which were significantly below those expected. This inadequate progress was identified and an alternative course is now in place at Key Stage 4. On this course, according to the data provided, students are making satisfactory progress.
- However 50% of the students at Key Stage 4 do not follow an ICT course. Although the students talk positively about how they use ICT across the curriculum they make inadequate progress with respect to all the aspects of the statutory ICT National Curriculum.
- The students in the sixth form who complete the A2 ICT course make satisfactory progress. However a significant minority of students fail the AS course and do not progress to the A2 course. These students make inadequate progress.
- In some lessons the use of ICT motivates the students and they behave well, this is particularly so in lessons where ICT is used to support the learning of other subjects. However in ICT lessons where the pace of learning is too slow and the students are not challenged by the activities there is much low level disruption.
- Students are aware of how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. You protect the students by providing a flexible and reliable ICT system which blocks access to certain websites.
- ICT is used well to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This support is enhanced by the ICT training learning support assistants have received.
- You are also using ICT to promote better attendance through the use of text messaging. This has had a significant impact on reducing the number of students who are persistently absent.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate.

- In many lessons the work set does not take into account the different needs and ability levels of the students. This is because the lessons are not based on accurate, thorough and regular assessment of the students' work. This means that all students are asked to complete the same work regardless of their ability, some students find the work too hard but the majority find it too easy.
- In too many lessons the work planned does not challenge the students, the pace of learning is too slow and the students make inadequate progress. In these lessons the majority of students engage in low level disruption. In many cases this then slows the lesson even more and further limits the amount of progress the students make.
- In the better lessons, particularly with the sixth form, there are good working relationships between the staff and the students. In these lessons members of staff plan work which is relevant and interesting to the students and also covers the requirements of the examination courses they are following.
- In lessons seen where ICT is used to support learning in other subjects it is used well. ICT is used successfully by the PE department to

enhance collaborative working and structure the students' work. In a travel and tourism lesson the good use of ICT enabled the students to develop their ideas and present their work in different ways. These lessons were structured well and enabled the students to make good progress.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The curriculum is inadequate.

- You have changed the Key Stage 4 curriculum to better meet the needs and interests of the students who decide to study ICT. You are also in the process of reviewing the sixth form curriculum to ensure that there is progression for more students from Key Stage 4 into the sixth form.
- Although some use of ICT is highlighted in schemes of work in other subjects it does not ensure that the high percentage of students who do not study ICT at Key Stage 4 receive their statutory entitlement to the ICT National Curriculum. The experience of these students depends on which subjects they take and which member of staff teaches them. The majority of the ICT work these students complete is based on communication and presenting information.
- The work that these students do in other subjects does not build upon their ICT knowledge and understanding from Key Stage 3. This means that students are often repeating skills they have already learnt rather than developing their ICT capability. The work the students cover is not assessed according to ICT criteria and the information is not passed to the ICT department. This means that the ICT department is unaware of the skills and ICT capabilities of these students.

Leadership and management of ICT

The leadership and management of ICT are inadequate.

- The four principles of best value: challenge, compare, consult, competition are adhered to, particularly with respect to ensuring that the products purchased meet the needs of the school and its students.
- You have ensured that ICT is available to students where and when they need it. This means that you have decided to locate ICT equipment in different areas of the school, and this is appreciated by the students, particularly those in the sixth form.
- Although there was a comprehensive review of ICT in December 2008 few changes have been made which have impacted on outcomes for students. This means that the serious inadequacies you highlighted in the review still remain and are hindering the amount of progress the students make.
- There is an ICT development plan. However the development plan is not linked to improving outcomes for students and the success criteria are not measurable. The actions to be taken focus on improving the ICT provision in the school and are a list of tasks to be completed.

- The ICT self evaluation highlights some of the weaknesses in the department, however the actions to eradicate those weaknesses are focused on improving the ICT facilities not on how the department can improve the learning of the students.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is inadequate.

- At Key Stage 3 students are unaware of their target levels, what level they are at and what they need to do to improve their work.
- Some students' work at Key Stage 3 is marked according to the examination course they are following. However there is much inconsistency in the marking and assessment of the students' work. Some work is just ticked with no reference to what the students need to do next, what they have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- The work at Key Stage 3 is not marked according to the National Curriculum. This means that it is not clear what level the students are at, what their target levels are and what they need to do to reach them.
- At Key Stage 4 there are also inconsistencies in the quality of the marking. It is not always clear what work students have done and to what standard. Some work is marked and a list of tasks to be completed is included. This does not enable the students to evaluate what they have done well and how they can improve their work.
- At Key Stage 4 the assessment of those students who do not follow an ICT course is sporadic and ad hoc. The work they have done and the progress they have made is not reported to their parents.
- In the sixth form some work is marked well. It is referenced to the examination criteria. It clearly informs the students what they have done well. However some work is just ticked with no indication of what the students have done well, what needs to be improved and what grade they are working at.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving teaching and learning to ensure that all students make at least satisfactory progress in ICT
- enabling those students at Key Stage 4 who do not follow an ICT course to receive their statutory entitlement to the ICT National Curriculum
- ensuring that the leadership and management of ICT are focused on improving outcomes for students
- improving the assessment of work and ensuring that the assessment is used in lessons to improve learning.

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