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19 March 2009

Mr B Warren
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Dear Mr Warren

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 the 17-18 March 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 parts of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is judged to be good. Much improvement has taken place since 2004 when it was judged to be unsatisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is good and standards are above average.

- There has been a significant improvement in the percentage of students achieving the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 4. Improvements in GCSE scores are good, with standards improving from well below average to above national expectations.
- By the end of Key Stage 3 students achieve well and reach above expected standards for their age. Across both key stages they have

well developed knowledge, skills and understanding that they apply ably in different contexts. Overall, students' achievement is good.

- Students are taught how to stay safe using ICT and understand they principles properly. They have a well-developed understanding of how to cope with internet and email safety, card cloning and identity theft.
- Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress and achieve good standards because, amongst other things, there is a sharp focus on making sure they understand how to do well in their coursework. Thus all students are on track to achieve the DIDA award this year. The more able and those with special gifts and talents also achieve well because of effective targeted teaching that meets their needs.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding. Their response to the teachers and to each other is excellent. They develop excellent work based skills such as speaking and listening skills, teamwork and independence.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching and learning are good with some of it outstanding. Strengths include well explained learning outcomes at the beginning of each lesson and excellent relationships which provide students with the confidence to ask searching questions. The beginnings of lessons are good because teachers use ICT starter activities to motivate the students to quick thinking. Each stage of the lesson is planned well and classes are brought together when appropriate to share good practice. The celebration of students' work and its use as an exemplar for others to aim to achieve is excellent.
- Teachers' questioning is good because they have good knowledge of their subject and thus all students are challenged to achieve well. Students are given many opportunities to take control of their learning and do so eagerly. Very well organised classrooms and activities results in them being able to follow a personalised learning programme. Support staff are used very effectively, for example in media studies lessons when using ICT.
- Across the school teachers use ICT well in their teaching with interactive whiteboards and a range of appropriate software.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is good overall. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been modified well to provide more challenge and has been compressed to allow students to begin an accredited course earlier than often found. There are some good subtleties to the planning of the modules; for example there is no 'power point' work covered in Year 7 as the school is aware that pupils use this software extensively in the Primary school. The Key Stage 4 scheme is good because it has raised standards. It is

carefully planned to make sure all students have the opportunities to receive at least one GCSE in the subject. However, the present lack of computer aided manufacturing (CAM) means that their exposure to control technology in Key Stage 4 is limited. The equipment is in place; its lack of use is not in any way the fault of the school but lies elsewhere in its ownership as part of the PFI build.

- Across the school there are some good opportunities for students to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding in different contexts and subjects, for example in media studies and languages. That said, much is dependent on individual teachers, the timetable and opportunities to access ICT resources. In some subjects students rarely use ICT themselves, though teachers use ICT a great deal in their teaching. There is no up to date map or plan of ICT across the curriculum.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management of ICT are good.

- The leadership and management of ICT are good. The improvement made to students' achievements are, in no small part, due to effective leadership and management of the subject.
- The school's approach to planning for ICT is underpinned by the principles of 'Best Value'. The whole school ICT management team has made a good start in identifying the systems and structures necessary to move the school forward next September in terms of whole school use. However, this is not articulated well in a development plan, nor is it currently the responsibility of one person to monitor the delivery of this programme. Progress in some areas has been slow to date.
- However, at whole school level, management and senior school leaders have a very accurate self evaluation that identifies correctly what needs to be done to improve. The plan for the future that includes development of the portal and migration from the school intranet to the VLE is good and shows the school is pushing hard to achieve excellence.

Use of Assessment

The assessment of ICT is satisfactory.

- Summative assessments of Year 7 and Year 8 students are rigorously carried out. Teachers use grade descriptors in Key Stage 3 to show students the level of their work and to explain what they should do to achieve the next level. Student self assessments at the end of each module record what it is that the students have done but they do not record what it is that the students know or understand. Consequently, as yet these records are not very useful to teachers of other subjects who might like to build on students' expertise in their lessons.
- Key Stage 4 assessment is good and informs students' next stage of learning. It is used very regularly to help them move on and they in

turn respond excellently to this by demanding to know what they need to do to achieve the highest grades. They are not complacent; many currently achieving a grade 'B' in GCSE are striving very hard to finally achieve a grade 'A'.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- focusing on managing the ICT experiences of students in other subjects so that a more coordinated approach to cross curricular ICT can be achieved
- mapping the ICT curriculum across the school and from it produce a whole school plan for the use and application of ICT that informs professional development
- modifying the end of module assessments so that they not only assess understanding but also become capable of informing other subject teachers about students' achievements in ICT
- getting the school's CAM equipment working in order to provide computer aided manufacturing.

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

John Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector