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Dear Mrs Tabberer

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during
my visit on 13 and 14 October 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 use of ICT to support learning in other
subjects. 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
students and staff; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students'
work; observation of 11 part lessons; an observation of a support session for
students with special educational needs; and a tour of the school by students.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement in subject: inadequate

■ Students enter the school with attainment levels which are broadly in line
   with the national average. By the end of Key Stage 3 students' attainment
   is below the national average and, students make inadequate progress
   during Key Stage 3.

■ At the end of Key Stage 4 students' attainment in ICT is below the national
   average. Overall students make inadequate progress in ICT during their
   time at the school.

■ In the sixth form students who study ICT make satisfactory progress.

- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are individually supported. The use of ICT to develop bespoke programmes for these students is good. Learning support assistants support students in lessons unobtrusively.

- Students have an adequate awareness of e-safety and how to use new technologies safely and responsibly.

Quality of teaching: inadequate

- The quality of ICT teaching is too variable. In too many of the lessons seen, the work the students were asked to complete did not challenge them. This limited the amount of progress the students were able to make in the lesson.

- Often all the students were asked to complete the same piece of work. This meant that some students finished the work quickly and others were unable to do so. When students had finished the work, or realised they were unable to complete it, they engaged in low level disruptive behaviour which slowed the pace of the lesson and limited the progress made.

- In some lessons the students completed the work they were asked to do with little understanding of what they were doing or why they were doing it.

- However, in one IT Diploma lesson seen the resources were up to date and relevant to the students. In this lesson students made good progress because of the careful planning, the range of activities and the good use of technology to support the learning.

Quality of the curriculum: inadequate

- In Key Stage 3, the students do not receive their statutory entitlement to the ICT National Curriculum. Additionally, the curriculum provided limits the students' ability to access the higher ICT levels and has contributed to the inadequate progress students make at Key Stage 3.

- In Key Stage 4, the students receive a very limited curriculum. It is not balanced and there is too much emphasis on communicating and presenting information to the detriment of other aspects of ICT, such as data logging, data handling and programming. This is detrimental to the students' future economic well-being.

- In the sixth form the two courses offered meet the needs of the students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management: inadequate

■ The departmental self-evaluation does highlight some of the areas of concern for the department. However, the actions the department plans to take in response to these are not specific. The actions are not time related, do not have success criteria and are not linked to outcomes for students.

■ The progress the students make between Year 7 and Year 11 has been inadequate for over two years. During this time there has been little action which has impacted specifically on improving students" outcomes. This lack of urgency and determination to improve the teaching and the progress students make in ICT contributed to the inadequate progress made by students in 2009.

■ There is very little coordination of the assessment, teaching and learning of ICT across the school. This means that staff in subjects other than ICT have an incomplete understanding of what the students have done before and what levels they are capable of when using ICT to develop their learning. Consequently, the students are not being challenged to improve their ICT skills and capability.

The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects: satisfactory

■ The use of ICT to support learning varies considerably. In some subjects, students have access to ICT in each lesson and the use of it is embedded.

■ In some lessons, ICT developed the students' understanding of the subject being taught. However, often ICT is used merely to improve the presentation of work the students have already completed. This slows the progress the students make in the subject as they are repeating work.

■ In one good English lesson seen, ICT was used to support the students' understanding of persuasive language. However, the low level of ICT skills the students had limited the development of their English work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

■ enabling the students to make at least satisfactory progress by:

- providing a curriculum at Key Stage 3 which allows them to access and achieve the higher levels
- improving the quality of teaching

■ broadening the curriculum at Key Stage 4 to enhance the students' future economic well-being

- developing and implementing a system for monitoring and assessing ICT across the school and ensuring that the data are shared and used in lessons

- ensuring the leadership and management of ICT have a strategic plan for eradicating the inadequacies seen.

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