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Mrs E Brown
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Brown

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: information and communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and girls, during my visit on 1 and 2 March 2010 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and girls; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of girls' work; observation of eight lessons; and a tour of the school conducted by two of the girls.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is good.

■ The school evaluates the girls' ICT skills during their first few weeks in Year 7. This shows that attainment on entry is well below average and that some girls have considerable gaps in their ICT experiences before joining the school. They make outstanding progress to attain average standards by the time they complete Key Stage 4. This represents good achievement.

■ The girls have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their financial transactions safe when online. They are aware of fraudulent

websites masquerading as the real thing and of how web-browsing patterns can be used to push specific advertising at targeted individuals.

■ Relationships, attitudes to learning and behaviour are excellent. The girls work very well together in teams or independently, often helping and supporting each other. Girls with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well by teaching assistants and appropriate modifications are made to ICT resources to enable those with disabilities to access the learning.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

■ Teachers have good subject knowledge and a good understanding of the examination board's requirements for the qualification. The girls are well taught and well motivated in ICT lessons. However, teachers do not always provide more challenging extension tasks for the most capable girls who complete the qualification requirements quickly.

■ The use of assessment is a real strength. The girls' work is marked accurately and regularly so that they are clear about their current levels of attainment and about what they need to do to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in ICT

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is good.

■ The girls have good opportunities to develop their use of ICT for communicating and presenting their ideas, for handling data and for capturing data from sensors connected to computers. Although statutory requirements for learning programming skills are met, opportunities do so are better at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4. The good start many girls make early on in ICT lessons is not built upon in later years.

■ The range of lunchtime and other voluntary activities related to the school's specialist status in mathematics and computing is outstanding. The school has been successful in national competitions, for instance to design greeting cards, and came first in a competition to create a DVD to promote careers in the National Health Service. During the summer holiday, 26 girls came into school for a week to learn about the components of a computer and to build computers from scratch. One of the girls involved said: 'I'm proud that I learnt how a computer works and that I built one for the school computer room'. Another said: 'I found it really fun. We learnt about the functions of the central processing unit, the motherboard and the hard drive.' Specialist status also supports a 'family learning' project where girls come into the school in the evenings and weekends to work with their parents to acquire ICT skills together. A group of mothers explained how the project had helped them to learn to use ICT for the first time and how, in turn, this had enabled them to find employment. As one mother put it: 'I am really pleased with the school for helping me and I'm really proud of myself' As many as seven computer

rooms are available for the girls to use during their lunch break and these are usually full and sometimes oversubscribed.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ICT

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in ICT is outstanding.

- The school has a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Improvement planning is systematic and derived from the school's self-evaluation of its own performance in which the girls play an integral part. They help to make change happen. The impact of implementing the plan is monitored and evaluated rigorously and reported in depth to the governing body each term.

- There is an extremely ambitious plan for an interactive learning zone which is already under construction. Parents, staff and the girls have been consulted about what they would like to see in the learning zone and a team of girls was involved in evaluating the bids from suppliers. Resources will include an innovative 3D projection auditorium, games consoles for fitness training and electronic book readers for the girls to access a virtual library.

- The strong upward trend in test results over the last three years together with the outstanding extra-curricular provision shows the school has an outstanding capacity to improve.

- Resources are managed extremely well to obtain good value for money. Freely available software is deployed where possible and the school is investigating the possibility of using multi-user technology to enable up to six girls to share one computer simultaneously. Around half the girls in three year groups have been given their own laptops to use at home through a scheme organised by the school.

The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects

The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects is good.

- There is a real excitement and enthusiasm among staff and the girls for using ICT to improve learning in other subjects. The school has had a flourishing virtual learning environment (VLE) in use for the last few years. The girls access a good range of learning resources and use it to move files between home and school. The VLE hosts a range of discussion forums. These forums are very well used by the girls to exchange views about their subject work, to seek help when they need it and to discuss, for instance, the topic of climate change with students from other countries.

- Good use of ICT to improve learning was seen in a range of subjects. Although the school has audited the ICT skills and to what level the girls will need to be able to use them in each subject, the girls' achievements in these circumstances are not assessed systematically.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing extension tasks to stretch higher attaining girls so that they can access post-16 computing qualifications
- providing more challenging opportunities at Key Stage 4 for all students to build upon the good start they make in programming at Key Stage 3
- systematically assessing girls' use of ICT in all other subjects and feeding that back in to the termly school development plan review.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ICT in the school.

As I explained previously, 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

David Anstead
Her Majesty's Inspector