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25 May 2010

Mr J Bate
Headteacher
Acklam Grange School: a Specialist College for
Mathematics and Computing
Lodore Grove
Acklam
TS5 8PB

Dear Mr Bate

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: information and communication technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 and 13 May 2010 to look at work in ICT.

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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of 11 part-lessons; short visits to two other lessons; and a tour of the school with students.

The overall effectiveness of ICT is inadequate because of the lack of suitable provision for all students in Key Stage 4. However, in other respects provision and outcomes are at least good.

Achievement in ICT

Achievement in ICT is inadequate.

■ Students enter the school with levels of ICT attainment which are broadly in line with the national average. However, this masks the wide range of literacy ability which has an impact on many students' ICT capability. By the end of Key Stage 3, students reach levels of attainment which are above the national average. Given their starting points, students make at least good, and often outstanding, progress during Key Stage 3.

■ In Key Stage 4, students can opt to study either a vocational ICT course or a GCSE course. Students who study the GCSE course make outstanding

progress and reach levels of attainment at the end of Year 11 that are well above the national average. Those who study the vocational course make equally exceptional progress and the proportion of students achieving and A to A* grades is much larger than the national average. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well to develop their ICT skills and capability and they make the same progress as their peers.

- At Key Stage 4, 35% of students do not formally study ICT, although they do have opportunities to develop their ICT skills and capability in other subjects. However, such opportunities are limited and these students make inadequate progress in the areas they do not study. Therefore, achievement overall is inadequate.

- Students say they feel safe in school when they are using new technologies. The development of their knowledge and understanding is supported through ICT lessons and across the school. Of particular note is the work done with the students, and their parents, who study through work-based learning.

Quality of teaching in ICT

The quality of teaching in ICT is good.

- Lessons are planned well. Departmental staff have good subject knowledge and use ICT confidently. In the best lessons, the pace of learning supported the students to make good progress. There was a focus on challenging the students to develop further their ICT knowledge and capability.

- In some lessons, the questions asked did not extend students' learning. In other lessons, all the students were asked to do the same task, with the result that some finished quickly while others struggled to understand what they had to do.

- Assessment at Key Stage 4 is accurate and ensures that the students know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. At Key Stage 3, assessment is being developed to ensure that students receive the same good feedback as in Key Stage 4.

- ICT is used innovatively to support all students, particularly the more vulnerable. For example, in mathematics, games consoles are used to develop mental agility. In English, handheld devices are helping students to spell. This use of ICT engages and motivates the students and challenges them to think quickly and accurately.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in ICT is inadequate.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum ensures that all students receive their entitlement to the statutory ICT National Curriculum in an engaging and

motivating way. The well-planned curriculum at Key Stage 3 is enhancing students' progress in developing their ICT skills and capability.

- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is inadequate because those students who opt not to study accredited ICT courses do not receive their entitlement to the statutory ICT National Curriculum. As a result, they make inadequate progress in the areas which they do not study. The curriculum provided for students who formally continue their study of ICT at Key Stage 4 is highly appropriate and flexible. Together with the Key Stage 3 curriculum, this enables the students to make outstanding progress.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are satisfactory with good features.

- The leaders and managers are fully aware of the inadequacies in the curriculum and the impact these have on students' achievement. There are well considered and comprehensive plans in place which aim to ensure that the curriculum at Key Stage 4 is at least satisfactory in the very near future.

- There is a rigorous system of self-review. This contributes to the development plan, which is well considered, and is leading to improvements in outcomes for students who study ICT.

- The principles of best value are adhered to well. In particular, students are actively engaged in testing and deciding on what type of ICT equipment to buy for the new school.

- The specialist computing status is enhancing the ICT provision in the school and also in its feeder primary schools. For example, teachers regularly teach ICT lessons in Years 5 and 6. In addition, there is a comprehensive training programme which has been well received by staff and given them confidence in using new technologies.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all students at Key Stage 4 make at least satisfactory progress by fully implementing the plans for the Key Stage 4 curriculum

- improving the standard of teaching so it is all at least good by:
    - providing all students with activities and tasks which are suitably matched to their abilities
    - allowing students to develop fully their answers to questions.

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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Tanya Harber Stuart
Her Majesty's Inspector