06 March 2008

Mr J Shannon
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Dear Mr Shannon

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03 – 04 March 2008 to look at work in information and communication technology (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, the observation of five lessons and an informative tour of your school with the head girl.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement and standards in ICT are satisfactory.

- Students join the school in Year 7 with broadly average skills in ICT. By the end of Year 9 their standard of attainment is average. This represents satisfactory achievement.
- Students at Key Stage 4 who choose to study a level 2 (double GCSE equivalent) qualification make good progress and attain standards above the national average. The most able students in particular produce work of an exceptionally high standard. For example, they use media software to combine music and video presentations and use

advanced web development software and HTML programming to produce high quality web sites.

- Over half the students in Key Stage 4 do not follow a taught programme of ICT but instead make satisfactory progress in applying and developing their use of ICT when studying other subjects.
- Students' personal development is satisfactory. Students behave well and work hard. When ICT is being used in lessons, students show a good level of interest and enthusiasm. However, occasionally tasks given to students are highly structured which limits the development of their independent learning skills.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning of ICT is satisfactory.

- Specialist ICT teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and this leads to clear, focused lessons which are appropriately challenging for all students.
- Relationships are usually good, especially at Key Stage 4 where students feel safe and supported and as a consequence have a very positive attitude towards their subject.
- Whilst lessons are never less than satisfactory, the pace of lessons is 'relaxed', and lessons do not start with a 'bang' they tend to fade in and out.
- There are limited opportunities for students to reflect on their learning or test their understanding against challenging learning objectives.
- At Key Stage 3, students are far less enthusiastic about their ICT than those studying the subject at Key Stage 4. This is because some of the teaching is overly structured which, whilst effectively delivering the curriculum, tends to lead to a formulaic approach which is less stimulating and enjoyable for students.
- Whilst students' work is always marked and graded at the end of assignments, there is little recorded formative assessment and students do not consistently know how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum for ICT is inadequate.

- The school successfully delivers a double GCSE equivalent course. The school has audited the delivery of ICT across the curriculum at Key Stage 4 but does not currently monitor the extent to which this is being delivered to those students not following the taught course. It is clear that not all students receive their statutory entitlement to the National Curriculum for ICT. To address this, the school has begun to deliver the Key Stage 4 course to students in Year 8 and Year 9, and is planning to enter them for their GCSE equivalent qualification at the end of Year 9. However, this is at an early stage and it is unclear at present whether this will enable the school to meet requirements.

- There is satisfactory access to computers outside of lesson times. Students can gain limited access to the school's ICT facilities from home. However, virtual learning platform is in its infancy and this restricts students' abilities to carry out research and homework.
- The use of ICT within other subjects is variable, but growing. At its best as in science, students make good use of the laptops to simulate scientific investigations. Communication and presentation software is widely used across the school.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- Whilst there is a clear plan for the development of ICT, the school lacks a sharp strategic vision of how ICT is going to drive developments in teaching and learning and consequently raise standards.
- Self evaluation is becoming increasingly rigorous within the ICT department and is now being used to set priorities for future improvement.
- The impact of the leadership and management can be seen in the good achievement on the Key Stage 4 course and the consistent meeting of performance targets at Key Stage 3.
- The ICT department is well managed and has a robust infrastructure. This is supporting the development of students' ICT capability within all subjects.
- Close monitoring of student ICT usage by the leadership and management protects all students from any form of cyber bullying or exposure to inappropriate web sites.
- The development of ICT across the curriculum has been audited but is not evaluated for the impact on students' ICT capability. This currently results in varying ICT experiences for students.

Subject issue - the impact of assessment on student achievement in ICT.

Assessment in ICT is satisfactory.

- The school uses the first assignment in Year 7 to assess students' ICT capability. This is then used as a basis for target setting and monitoring of future performance.
- Students are assessed at the end of each unit of work but there is little recorded formative assessment and as a result students are unclear of what they need to do to improve their work.
- The introduction of the Key Stage 4 course in Years 8 and 9 has led to some confusion amongst the students because teacher feedback is given as a pass, merit or distinction whereas reports are given in levels.
- Assessment on the Key Stage 4 course is good. Students are closely tracked by teachers and are engaged in self and peer assessment. Whilst this gives students a clear understanding of the various

competencies they need to demonstrate, assessment data is not being used for students to develop their own personalised learning plan.

- Students are very comfortable about accepting and giving constructive criticism.

Inclusion

The subject's contribution to the inclusion of students is satisfactory.

- Staff work hard to ensure that most students are provided with interesting ICT opportunities that will prepare them well for their future education or employment. The introduction and good use of laptops for example are supporting low attaining students in science.
- Lesson plans usually provide extension activities for students so that the work they are given closely matches their ability.
- The curriculum does not meet the needs of all students at Key Stage 4.
- Additional ICT clubs give good support for students without a computer at home.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all students receive their statutory entitlement to the National Curriculum for ICT
- ensuring that lessons in Key Stage 4 use challenging learning objectives and provide more opportunity for reflection and evaluation
- increasing the frequency and quality of formative assessment so that students know precisely how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
- ensuring that the vision for ICT is clearly articulated to all staff and is given prominence in the school's strategic improvement plan.

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

Geoff Hancock
Additional Inspector