13 July 2009

Mrs J Featherstone
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Dear Mrs Featherstone

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 8-9 July 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 and a recording from Teachers' TV, analysis of students' work, observation of nine part lessons and observation of a training event for staff and students.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is satisfactory. Standards are broadly average.

- Attainment on entry is broadly average. Students make good progress through Key Stage 3 to attain above average standards by the end of Year 9. Although the progress made by Key Stage 4 students has improved recently, their overall progress since joining the school is satisfactory and they attain average standards.
- The school was featured on Teachers' TV recently for its leading work on e-safety. Two designated co-ordinators have produced detailed guidance for staff, students and parents about how students can keep

themselves safe when online. This is supplemented by a series of assemblies and lessons to further develop students' awareness and understanding of the issue. Students related to me how a demonstration showing how a stranger might easily obtain personal information from social networking web sites had made a strong impact on them. They said they now followed the school's guidance for protecting themselves. Another group of students have been trained as 'cyber mentors' to support victims of 'cyberbullying' in their own school and in a partner school. Investigations of any incidents are guided by a detailed flow diagram and specific e-safety pro-formas which inform other safeguarding procedures and agencies where appropriate. The effectiveness and impact of the school's provision is thoroughly evaluated.

- Attitudes to learning and behaviour are excellent. Students are well motivated, polite and get on very well with each other.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and skills in using the school's range of software applications.
- Where ICT is taught as a subject, teaching and learning are good. Lessons are characterised by the excellent use of assessment information in planning activities appropriate to students' different starting points. Teachers explain the concepts behind the tasks clearly before students try them out for themselves. In a lesson on databases the teacher used role play to help students understand the difference between a simple and complex query. His accompanying explanation was a model of clarity and ensured students understood how to utilise logical operators to further refine their queries.
- In an outstanding music lesson the use of recording technology enabled students to compose regardless of whether they could play the keyboard or not. The use of ICT removed what would have been a barrier to learning for some and allowed them to access practical work on using the chromatic scale.
- The special needs team have deployed screen reading software and headphones to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities when using ICT. This has had a marked impact on their achievement. For example, one autistic boy with severe dyslexia has made 18 months worth of progress in his reading in just six months. His confidence and self-esteem have been boosted because the use of the software has helped him overcome an obstacle to his learning as well as enabling him to work more independently and with less support from adults.
- ICT resources enhance teaching and learning in many subjects making lessons more engaging and enjoyable. On occasion, although opportunities for students to use ICT in other subjects were created, the time spent using ICT detracted from the time spent on working towards that lesson's learning objectives.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- There is good provision for students to use ICT for communicating and presenting their ideas. Although statutory requirements are met some older students have fewer opportunities than others to use spreadsheets for modelling. Some Key Stage 4 students have developed their programming skills whilst others have had insufficient opportunities to be able to do so. The school has recognised this and plans are in place to introduce a GCSE in computing next year.
- Science provides good opportunities for students to learn to use sensors connected to computers to record changes over time. For instance, in one experiment, students used temperature probes and test tubes filled with warm water representing groups of penguins to investigate the benefits of huddling behaviour in extreme environments.
- The curriculum provides a good range of qualifications which enables students of differing abilities' achievements to be accredited and ensures they have clear progression routes to appropriate post-16 courses.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are good.

- Through a comprehensive quality assurance programme you are well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The performance of ICT has been a concern and accordingly you and your senior leaders have been providing extensive extra support and guidance. There has been a marked improvement in the quality of teaching and learning and in the use of assessment and consequently, students' achievement has improved too. Standards at Key Stage 3 have improved to be above average and there are indications of improvement at Key Stage 4 also. These are less marked because the improvements in the quality of teaching and learning have had less time to have had an impact. Together with the appointment of a new Head of Department who takes up post shortly, ICT has a good capacity to continue to improve.
- Your vision is to spread the use of ICT widely to improve learning in all subjects and to use ICT to improve the management and administration of the school. This is in keeping with your school's specialist status in mathematics and computing and is a vision the staff enthusiastically subscribe to. Resources are very well managed by the network manager and made available to students in the classes where they need them. ICT resources are generous: as one girl said 'you can always find a computer to use when you want one.'
- You apply the four principles of best value well in obtaining good value for money from your investments in ICT. The school continually challenges the way resources are provided, benchmarks itself against

similar schools and seeks the views of students and parents about how provision could be improved.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is good.

- Attainment on entry is evaluated through a transition project that students begin in Year 6 before they join the school and which they complete at the start of Year 7. Assessment of this project together with visits made by ICT teachers to primary schools enables the school to establish a good picture of new students' National Curriculum levels. These are used to set challenging ICT targets for students.
- The ICT team have an excellent system for tracking individual students' progress in ICT. Tracking clearly identifies which students are on course to meet or exceed their target grades and shows any students that are falling behind. The system includes monitoring information about individual effort in lessons and quality of work completed at home and so gives an indication of why individual progress is like it is. Extra support is provided for students identified as underachieving to help them catch up.
- The quality of written feedback students receive on how they might improve their work is outstanding. Students say this is of great help to them.
- Although students make plentiful use of ICT when working in other subjects, their achievements are not assessed. This means the ICT team are unaware of how well students are able to apply the skills they have taught them elsewhere.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the use of ICT in other subjects always enhances the progress students make towards achieving their learning objectives
- giving equal emphasis to all aspects of the National Curriculum and increasing the provision for programming
- assessing students' use of ICT when working in other subjects.

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

David Anstead
Her Majesty's Inspector