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Mrs Barker
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Dear Mrs Barker

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 19-20 November 2008 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, analysis of students' work and observation of seven part lessons and an assembly to Year 9.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is satisfactory, standards are average.

- Students enter the school with standards which are broadly in line with those expected for their age. The students' skills in terms of presenting information and communicating using technology are good. However their knowledge, skills and understanding with respect to control technology, spreadsheets and databases are weaker.
- By the end of Year 9 students reach standards which are broadly in line with those expected in terms of the National Curriculum. This means that vast majority of students make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3.

- By the end of Year 11, in 2008, the un-validated results show that the students who took the ICT BTEC and AS qualifications reached standards which were well above those expected nationally. These students made outstanding progress in Key Stage 4 and good progress between Year 7 and Year 11.
- However, the remaining students at Key Stage 4 followed a different ICT course. These students reached standards which were in line with those expected and made satisfactory progress.
- Students taking ICT qualifications in the sixth form start, and finish, their courses with standards which are broadly in line with those expected. They make satisfactory progress. Many of the students who take ICT courses have a low literacy level and this hinders their ability to make good progress in ICT.
- When the students are using ICT they are polite and respectful. They are prepared to share the ICT facilities when they need to and the use of ICT across the school is allowing the students to develop their independent learning skills.
- The department ensures that Year 7 students know how to stay safe on the internet and when using new technologies through a taught module. This is reinforced through assemblies. There is a comprehensive home-school agreement in place which all parents/carers have agreed to. The students spoken to understood the need to stay safe on the internet and how they could keep themselves safe. They applied this knowledge and understanding when using new technologies.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning of ICT is satisfactory.

- All the lessons seen were planned well and planning was supported by the whole school lesson planning pro forma. All members of staff had good subject knowledge.
- Use of assessment in sixth form lessons was good and sometimes outstanding. This ensured that students were aware of where they were, where they were going and how they were going to move between the two. The assessment was specific to the students and closely linked to the examination criteria. Sixth form students appreciate the assessment and feedback they receive from members of staff.
- However, in some Key Stage 3 and 4 lessons seen the students were all asked to complete the same task. This meant that some of them were able to complete the task easily, and some found it more difficult. This limited the amount of progress some students made.
- The students' learning is enhanced through extra classes, homework, support from learning mentors and catch up sessions.
- In a mathematics lesson seen ICT was used to good effect. Students were able to quickly construct graphs using the computers which then enabled them to discuss the mathematics concepts behind the graphs.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The ICT curriculum is good.

- The use of ICT is mapped across the curriculum. All the faculties review their use of ICT and this is fed back to the ICT department through the faculty ICT links. However the feedback does not always show what work each student has completed in ICT in each subject. This means that the ICT department is not always aware of the standard of work each student achieves in ICT across their subjects.
- At Key Stage 4 all students now follow the ICT BTEC course. This is started in Key Stage 3 and enables the students to pass an ICT qualification by the end of Year 10. A small number of students are able to follow an AS ICT course in Year 11 which they then have the opportunity to complete in Year 12.
- At Key Stage 3 the students follow a course which is linked to the National Curriculum and also covers the requirements of some of the ICT BTEC qualification. The Key Stage 3 course is strongly based around the spreadsheets and databases elements of ICT. Control technology is covered through music and technology and data logging through science.
- In the sixth form students are able to choose from a range of ICT courses. The sixth form caters for all students from a number of schools and the range of courses is designed to meet both the needs and interests of the students and also to enable them to continue their education or training after they leave the school.
- The ICT curriculum is regularly reviewed. This involves making sure that the courses offered at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are the most appropriate for the students in the school.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory.

- The strategic leadership and management of ICT are good.
- You have a clear and comprehensive vision for ICT. This vision encompasses your aim to improve the academic standards reached by the students, but also to provide the students with the necessary ICT life skills.
- This vision is encompassed in a comprehensively costed ICT development plan which considers teaching and learning, the virtual learning environment (VLE) and the community.
- You are working well with the community to ensure that they also have access to ICT facilities through your technology school status. This has involved providing externally accredited courses, with support from other providers. These courses have also improved the ICT knowledge, skills and understanding of your technical staff and your learning support assistants.
- The ICT department work closely with your five main feeder primary schools to develop the teaching and learning of control, spreadsheets

and databases. This work, and the ICT summer schools, are raising the students' standards.

- The self-evaluation of the department is over generous in key elements. It does highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the department and identifies some appropriate areas for development.
- The VLE is managed well. It is used to good effect in the sixth form and the students in the sixth form appreciate the ease with which they can contact members of staff.
- You are in the process of developing the use of the VLE in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. This development is involving the students to ensure that they have a VLE which they are able to use and find useful.
- The procurement of ICT resources is both supported and monitored by the governors and the four principles of best value: challenge, competition, consult and compare, are adhered to.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is good.

- A base line assessment test is now in place for Year 7. This shows that students enter the school with varying skills and capability. Students' skills in presenting information and communication are better than those in control and data handling.
- Students are assessed every six weeks, in line with the whole school system, and appropriate intervention strategies are put in place.
- In the sixth form, assessment is a strength of teaching and learning.
- At Key Stage 4 the assessment is comprehensive. It clearly identifies what students have to do to improve their work and the target grade. Students know and understand the work they have to complete to enable them to reach their target.
- At Key Stage 3 the use of assessment is helping the students to know what level they are and what they need to do to improve. However there is an emphasis on the criteria used for the examination courses which is, in many cases, hindering the progress made by the students with respect to their ICT capability across the National Curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning of ICT to ensure that all students make good progress
- developing the use of assessment at Key Stage 3
- ensuring that ICT work completed in other subjects is fed back to the ICT department on a student by student basis.

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