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Mr R Davis
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Davis

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 17–18 June 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, analysis of students' work and observation of five part lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement is good. Standards are above average.

- Standards in ICT are just below average when students join the school. Students make good progress during Key Stage 3 so that by the end of Year 9, standards have improved to be above average. An excellent Key Stage 4 curriculum makes a major contribution to ensuring the vast majority of students continue to make good progress and attain above average standards. A significant minority make outstanding progress.
- Higher attaining students in Year 11 undertake an AS qualification designed for post-16 students who are a year older. This is a significant challenge for them and, although standards in comparison

to older students are average, in comparison to those of their own age group, standards are above average.

- Students have many opportunities to work independently which they make good use of. Relationships and behaviour are excellent.
- Students are aware of how to keep themselves safe when online. They are well acquainted with the dangers of identify theft and 'phishing' posed by online transactions.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

Teaching and learning are good.

- The quality of teaching and learning of ICT where it is taught as a subject is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and good technical skills. Lessons are characterised by very well planned and structured activities that are appropriate to students' different starting points. The tasks really engage and motivate students who greatly enjoy their ICT lessons. Students are particularly appreciative of the individual help and support they get from their ICT teachers.
- ICT is widely used to improve learning in other subjects. In a history lesson for example, students used presentation software to summarise the main points about the Cuban missile crisis. The software helped them develop their summarising skills using bullet points. In a graphics lesson students learnt high level technical skills in creating, manipulating and layering objects to create a logo for a jar of marmalade.
- Every subject area has at least one suite of desktop computers so that students always have ready access to ICT wherever they are working in the school. Teachers make effective use of the plentiful interactive whiteboards and subject specific resources. Students say being able to use ICT to improve learning in all subjects is one of the best aspects of this school. As one girl said: 'it permeates all subjects and we use it a lot out of school'.
- Around half the teachers regularly use the virtual learning environment (VLE) as part of their lessons. This makes relevant resources available in lessons and can be used to block irrelevant ones. For example it is possible for teachers to make available a list of web sites that will help students research a particular topic in the lesson they are doing whilst at the same time blocking internet access to any other site not on the list. Regular use of the VLE is helping to bring more variety into teaching and learning and students say it is helping them with their homework tasks.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The curriculum is outstanding.

- The impact of the school's specialist status in mathematics and computing is seen in the outstanding curriculum provision. This has been carefully thought out and planned to ensure that the full range of students' needs are met. At Key Stage 3 specialist 'transition groups'

support vulnerable students transferring from primary schools. A core curriculum including elements of ICT is taught by specialist transition class teachers. Some students are supported in this way as far as Year 9 if their needs require it. At Key Stage 4 there are three broad pathways appropriate for higher, middle and lower attaining students. Lower attaining students follow a locally devised level 1 course with a strong focus on ICT and media. Middle attaining students can choose from a vocational qualification with either two or four GCSE equivalence. Higher attaining students are encouraged to complete the four GCSE equivalent vocational course in just one year and then take an AS in ICT during Year 11.

- There are clear progression routes from Key Stage 4 into the sixth form which results in unusually high numbers of students choosing to stay on in the school and study AS and A level ICT. More than half of all sixth formers choose to study ICT and around half of these are girls. This is in stark contrast to the trend seen nationally. Students say it is because they have had a very good experience of ICT at the school beforehand, because they have confidence in their teachers to explain things well and to support them effectively and because the pathways from Key Stage 4 ICT to ICT A level are clear.
- The range of after school ICT activities for students is excellent and they are very well attended. Around 30 girls participate in the national Computer Club for Girls (CC4G) scheme where in the past they have produced a magazine collaboratively and presented their work to the local university. A group of Year 9 students stay on after school to work on their entry for an annual robotics competition. Students have to program a robot to complete a number of predetermined tasks within three minutes. The school was the regional champion in 2007 and national runner up in 2008. Another 80 or so students participate in a film club to supplement their media studies work using ICT.
- All aspects of the statutory National Curriculum are extremely well covered. Students have excellent opportunities to learn and develop their programming skills and to utilise the more complex functionality of spreadsheets and databases. Extensive use is made of data logging in science lessons although the current range of sensors available to students is limited.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are good.

- The impact of good leadership and management is seen in the rising standards and the increasing numbers of students flocking to take ICT in the sixth form in contrast to the trend seen nationally.
- You and your senior staff have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses which is well informed by questionnaires to staff and students on what they would like to see improved next. Strategic planning is sensibly costed and prioritised and resources are well managed.
- Your school is very well resourced for ICT. A significant investment over the last few years has meant ICT has been made available in all

subject areas and is being extensively used. Both staff and students say it is improving their work and improving the quality of their learning. However, some staff feel they are not getting the most out of the ICT resources and say they need more opportunities for training and time to learn how to use the new facilities.

- You recognise that some aspects of provision are not systematically evaluated as others and have plans in place to address this next academic year. Although there is plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest ICT is having an impact on learning in other subjects, the school has not formally evaluated this. Similarly, provision for teaching students about e-safety is good but the school has not evaluated the impact it has.

Use of Assessment

The use of assessment is satisfactory.

- Specialist status funding enables the school to release ICT staff to work alongside their primary school colleagues for around half a day a week. Teachers from the school are involved in assessing the ICT capabilities of Year 6 pupils before they join the school and so have a good understanding of the strengths and needs of the incoming cohort.
- Students work in ICT is thoroughly and regularly assessed. Students get good feedback on their performance and excellent guidance on how to improve their work.
- ICT assessments are recorded as National Curriculum levels in an excellent whole school tracking system. This enables the ICT team and the academic coaches to monitor individual progress and provide extra support where necessary.
- However, students' use of ICT when working in other subjects is not assessed and so the ICT team is unaware of how well students are able to apply their skills in other lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- assessing students' use of ICT when working in other subjects so that the ICT team is aware of how well students are able to use the skills they have taught them elsewhere
- auditing the development needs of teachers and teaching assistants and providing time and training for these needs to be met.

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