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Mr A Boxhall
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Dear Mr Boxhall

Ofsted survey inspection programme of secondary schools 2007/8
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10-11 December 2007 to look at work in ICT.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of ICT, the visit had a particular focus on the quality of the assessment of 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. 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in ICT are satisfactory overall.

- Students make satisfactory progress to reach standards that are broadly average.
- Progress in ICT lessons is good in Years 7 to 9, and in the single and double award courses in Years 10 and 11. Progress on the short course GCSE is satisfactory. Students make use of their ICT skills in other subjects, but rarely learn new ones.
- Students' personal development is satisfactory. Behaviour is usually good for the majority in lessons, but there are often one or two pupils who are not concentrating.
- By Year 10, students have developed a good level of independence.

- Attendance is well below average and punctuality is poor.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is satisfactory.

- Teaching in ICT lessons is often good. Teachers structure lessons well. They often use a number of short sharp tasks that keep students focussed and push the lesson along at a good pace. Any misbehaviour is always dealt with quickly and effectively.
- Teachers have a good command of the subject, which allows them to set work that covers the National Curriculum requirements in full. However, work is often pitched at the level of middle ability students, without taking sufficient account of the highest and lowest attainers. When students are placed in pairs, with a higher and lower ability student working together, the more able student will often do the work, while the other student simply watches.
- ICT is used extensively in some subjects, such as music, to make lessons more interesting. However, in other subjects ICT is rarely used owing to the difficulty of accessing computers.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school provides a satisfactory curriculum. The discrete ICT courses are well planned to cover requirements in full. There is a good range of courses in Years 10 and 11, although the short course is not liked by students because they do not feel it is relevant to their needs. The time allocated to the short course restricts students' progress.
- The use of ICT in other subjects is limited. Some, such as music, use ICT as an integral part of the curriculum. Others, such as PE use it infrequently but in an innovative way. Several subjects make little or no use of ICT other than for preparing coursework in Years 10 and 11.

Leadership and management of ICT

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The ICT department is led and managed well. Standards are rising because good monitoring identifies where improvements can be made. Checks on lessons are detailed, and data is analysed well to highlight strengths and weaknesses.
- At a whole school level, there are some significant weaknesses. There is no sustainable strategy for the procurement or replacement of resources, and no long term plan for the development of ICT across the school. This has led to the school falling behind most others. Students cannot access their work from home, for example, and there is no virtual learning environment.
- There are insufficient resources for teachers to use when they need them.

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

Assessment in ICT is good.

- The assessment of students' work is accurate and allows teachers to pinpoint exactly where improvements can be made.
- Students' progress is checked each term against challenging targets. Any at risk of underachieving immediately receive extra support that is matched well to their needs. Their progress is tracked more frequently, and should they not improve quickly enough, more support provided.

Inclusion

- Students who are new to the country and speak little or no English do not receive enough support in lessons. The teacher often does their very best, but there are no resources available to help them or extra support staff to work with the student. This often leaves the student unable to play any part in the lesson.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing greater access to resources to allow teachers and students to make more use of ICT in other subjects
- producing a sustainable, long term plan for the development of ICT across the school
- ensuring that students who are new to the country and speak little or no English receive sufficient support to allow them to play a full part in lessons.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ICT in the school.

This visit has raised serious concerns about the school's work. I will report these to the Regional Divisional Manager who will consider what action to take and may arrange an inspection of the whole 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 Driscoll
Additional Inspector