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Mrs B Stevens
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Dear Mrs Stevens

Ofsted survey inspection programme – ICT

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on the 29-30 January 2008 to look at work in ICT.

As well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit also focused 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 learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and six part lesson observations with senior leaders.

The overall effectiveness of ICT was judged to be satisfactory and improving.

Achievement and standards in ICT

Achievement and standards in ICT are satisfactory. Students make good progress in Key Stage 3 and standards by the end of Year 9 are above national averages. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is broadly average.

- The school has correctly identified the reasons for the underperformance of some pupils at Key Stage 4, particularly in the numbers of students achieving grades A* to C at GCSE.
- Students are particularly good at using spreadsheets, modelling and website design. They are also making increased use of their personal hand held technologies, for example downloading audio files which they can listen to at a later date.
- Where ICT is being used in other subjects it is having a good impact on improving standards and accelerating rates of progress. This is because the application of ICT in other subjects facilitates personalised learning,

promotes creativity and improves the quality and content of students' work. This has been particularly noticeable in science at Key Stage 3 with students using graphics tablets to annotate their work and webcams to record what they are learning.

- ICT is used very effectively to enhance students' personal development and well-being and there are some very good examples in the work students have been doing in citizenship. Students' attitudes to learning are improved through their use of ICT, particularly when they help each other. This in turn helps to increase their self-esteem. They demonstrate a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe when using technology and the importance of developing skills which will contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning of ICT

The quality of teaching and learning in ICT is satisfactory with pockets of good practice.

- Many staff have benefited from good quality training and this has led to more teaching and support staff using ICT effectively and confidently.
- The use of ICT as a teaching and learning resource across the curriculum is still variable within departments and year groups. This is partly due to limited ICT resources for most departments, but also because of the need for additional training for some staff.
- Where teaching and learning are good or better, the contents of lessons build successfully on previous learning and are presented within a meaningful context which is of interest to students. In these lessons resources are used interactively and creatively and provide students with good levels of challenge and visual stimulation. Students particularly enjoy the use of animation, colour and the ability to work at their own pace.
- Where teaching and learning are less effective, this is usually because some important teaching strategies when using ICT are overlooked and the use of assessment to support learning is not sufficiently well embedded in lessons. This results in slower rates of progress for some students and missed opportunities for others to work independently.
- Students have benefited from the typing skills they developed at Key Stage 2 as this has ensured they have the keyboard skills required to make best use of ICT. Students are looking forward to making more use of the school's VLE to further support their learning.

Quality of the curriculum for ICT

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum has recently been improved and is now relevant, innovative and modified to meet the needs of students' differing starting points. However, there is still insufficient challenge for the most capable individuals.

- Although some of the Key Stage 4 curriculum is good, aspects of the GCSE courses are inadequate. The A level course has been successful, but has been at the expense of the GCSE students in other groups. The school is aware of the need to improve the management and organisation of the GCSE courses.
- Where ICT is used across the curriculum it is used well and helps to bring some subject content, for example history, to life. The science department is making good use of ICT to support the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and this is leading to rising standards in this phase.
- Students would welcome more access to ICT resources in other subjects.

Leadership and management of ICT

The quality of leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory and have improved at an accelerated pace in the last few months.

- The new head of department is developing her role well and she receives good support from the senior leadership team. In a short space of time, she has gained the respect of students who value the difference she has made to the ICT learning environment. They appreciate the increased guidance and levels of support they now receive. Senior leaders are working very hard to fill the gaps in students' learning.
- Tracking systems for the department, which were previously underdeveloped, are improving. Targets have been set for all students, but the progress made by different ability groups has yet to be monitored and evaluated rigorously.
- The quality of self-evaluation is now good and has been used to inform the ICT action plan. Although the quality of planning is satisfactory, it does not focus sharply enough on the intended outcomes for learners or provide success criteria which are sufficiently quantifiable or measurable.

Impact of the use of assessment on ICT

Impact of the use of assessment on ICT is satisfactory.

- The use of assessment has improved significantly this year. This has led to better and more accurate setting of targets.
- The use of teacher and peer assessment is developing well but has yet to become firmly embedded. Data about students is now being used well to inform planning, but this requires further refinement.
- Students benefit from knowing their targets and what they are working towards. This is set out well on the self -assessment forms and students appreciate having access to information about what they need to do to progress to the next level.

Inclusion

The impact of ICT on promoting inclusion is good.

- The use of ICT as a learning tool significantly improves the ability of those students with learning difficulties and disabilities to access the curriculum. This is leading to accelerated rates of progress for some students and improved levels of self-esteem and confidence.
- Students with special educational needs receive good intervention support. This is proving successful as the vast majority who are withdrawn for additional support are successfully re-integrated back into their class.
- Staff make good use of booster material for the few students who arrive in Year 7 with a low level of ICT skill. This enables this group of students to progress as well as their peers.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the proportion of students attaining the top A* to C grades at GCSE
- embedding the use of assessment for learning to help all teachers gain an accurate view of students' needs and progress
- improving the programme of work at Key Stage 4 as well as the organisation of how courses are delivered, particularly for pupils preparing for GCSEs
- ensuring that improvement planning for ICT details the intended outcomes for learners and includes quantifiable and measurable success criteria.

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

Gehane Gordelier
Her Majesty's Inspector