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Get them all involved: Want to know the secret of successful ICT in secondary schools? Get organised.

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Get them all involved.

Want to know the secret of successful ICT in secondary schools? Get organised.

Roger Crawford, TES Teacher, pp24-5, 5/17/2

There are many reasons to celebrate in Ofsted's latest secondary subject report on ICT. Teaching has improved and pupils' achievement has improved. ICT is the fastest growing subject at GCSE with over half of those entered awarded the higher grades, and standards were maintained as the A-level entry increased by 15%. However, Ofsted identify continuing weaknesses in the leadership and management of ICT. As usual, they are very good at identifying weaknesses but don't suggest what might be done to improve. Not that I would always want them to, however reassuring this might be, as schools trying out creative and innovative strategies might feel stifled. However, it's useful to know what successful ways of managing ICT in secondary schools have been developed.

In the secondary schools which are most successful at managing ICT, the headteacher or a senior deputy is an enthusiastic ICT leader. He or she chairs an ICT leadership committee which includes other ICT literate senior management and ICT experts, such as the Head of ICT, the ICT coordinator, the network manager, etc. This leadership committee of around five members of staff makes key decisions about whole school ICT. For example, how ICT will be timetabled; which hardware and software to buy; where it will be located in the school and who will have access to it; the number of specialist ICT teachers and technicians needed; how other teachers will be trained to use ICT; Internet and email policy. To ensure this leadership committee meets the needs of the whole school, it is guided by a more open ICT committee which any member of staff can attend. This open committee is usually chaired by the Head of ICT or the ICT coordinator, and will include an ICT evangelist from each subject department and support staff. In addition, there is an ICT department which is organised in a similar way to more traditional departments, such as the mathematics department or the science department.

Why does this arrangement for managing ICT work better than others? Like any other subject department, the ICT department can be expected to organise the curriculum effectively and promote effective ICT teaching. It will push for sufficient timetabled time for ICT and make sure pupils are entered for GNVQ or GCSE ICT, etc. The needs of the whole school are taken into account through the open ICT committee, and teachers' enthusiasms can be built into whole school planning. If sub-committees are needed for specific issues, it is more obvious who is interested, and these can be formed more easily. The leadership committee ensures that decisions are made quickly, and that these are well informed, meet the needs of the whole school, and represent good value for money. This arrangement assumes that ICT in secondary schools is taught better when it is organised as a discrete subject complemented by the use of ICT across the curriculum. A very few schools organise ICT provision effectively entirely across the curriculum, but most secondary schools find this very difficult.

What evidence do I have that this way of managing ICT in secondary schools is successful? I've recently completed research which looked at ways of managing ICT as one factor associated with high levels of ICT capability among pupils in Key Stage 4. The most successful schools managed ICT in ways very similar to that described. I also looked at general theories about the management of schools, and tried to derive from these successful strategies for the management of ICT in secondary schools. Interestingly, this analysis strongly supports the approach described.

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