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Mr P Enright
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Enright

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: economics and business education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 20 and 21 January 2011 to look at work in economics and business education.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of economics and business education, including the development of students' economic and business understanding and enterprise and financial capability, is good.

Achievement in economics and business education

Achievement in economics and business education is good.

- Overall attainment is above average. In 2010, although attainment in GCSE Business Studies was high in the A* to C grade range, it was in line with the national average in the A* to A range. However, it was slightly below the average grade for other subjects in the school. Attainment in GCE Business Studies in 2010 was high at both AS and A levels, an improvement on previous years when it was broadly in line with the national average. Attainment in GCE Economics in 2010 fell to below the national average in AS and A level from the high level of previous years.
- Overall, progress is good and most students are meeting or working beyond the challenging targets they are set.

- Students have very good attitudes to learning; they are able to work very well independently and in small groups, remaining on tasks and motivated.
- Students not taking formally assessed economics and business courses are well informed. In particular, they are developing good work-related learning skills and enterprise capabilities, including the ability to work as team members, and problem-solving and communication skills. Although their financial capability is developing well, their economics and business understanding is weaker.

Quality of teaching in economics and business education

The quality of teaching in economics and business education is good.

- Lessons are planned and paced consistently well and use good resources. This ensures that all students make at least good progress and some make outstanding progress. While all teaching is at least good, some is outstanding and, where this is the case, the teacher conveys a real sense of passion about the subject to students.
- Teachers of formally assessed economics and business courses are very confident subject specialists who consistently make use of real-world contexts to enhance the subject.
- Teachers make constant references to assessment objectives and to the higher level skills that students need to demonstrate if they are to achieve the highest grades. Students are provided with good feedback on their progress and marking is accurate. However, marking does not always highlight sufficiently clearly how well answers reflect the various assessment objectives that students are required to demonstrate in their written work.
- Teachers' use of questioning to confirm knowledge and understanding is good. However, not all students or classes are given the opportunity to demonstrate higher level skills in their oral responses because questioning is not always sufficiently challenging.
- Teachers provide very good support to students and relationships between students and teachers are very good.
- Teaching on relevant aspects of personal, social, health, citizenship and economics education (PSHCE) is good, with teachers being enthusiastic, well-informed and well-prepared.

Quality of the curriculum in economics and business education

The quality of the curriculum in economics and business education is good.

- Formally assessed economics and business courses meet the needs of students well, offering good progression opportunities both in the sixth form and in preparation for higher education. Although no vocational courses are provided in business, students have opportunities to access a range of other vocational-related courses, including travel and tourism and ASDAN.

- Good links with business and employers are available to enhance teaching and learning and efforts are being made to extend these further, including exploring links with parents who are employers.
- All students have good opportunities to develop work-related skills and enterprise and personal financial capability through a well-planned PSHCE programme. However, economic and business understanding is not a strong element of the provision. Additional enrichment and extra-curricular activities, for example in conjunction with the local education business partnership and the wide range of charitable fund raising activities, including the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative, enhance the provision.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in economics and business education

Leadership and management in economics and business education are good.

- Both the economics and business department and the whole-school provision for enterprise education are led and supported well by the senior leadership team.
- Accurate self-evaluation is undertaken at departmental level, which is informed by regular external and internal audits and by students' views. Self-evaluation is focused clearly on raising attainment and on improving progress. As a result, the department has a clear view of strengths and weaknesses and of priorities for improvement.
- Students are set challenging targets and staff show a clear commitment to support students in achieving these. Monitoring and evaluation are rigorous and thorough so that underachievement is identified and dealt with promptly and effectively.
- Whole-school provision for work-related learning and employability skills and the broader aspects of enterprise and financial capability are well-planned and coordinated.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- sharpening marking so that it highlights more clearly where, and how well, students are demonstrating higher level skills in their written work
- ensuring that teachers use questioning to deepen and extend learning and provide students with opportunities to develop their oral responses
- developing the whole-school provision for economic and business understanding within the enterprise education provision and ensuring that this is well-informed by the contribution of subject specialists.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop economics and business education in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector