

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Mark Anstiss
Headteacher
Felpham Community College
Felpham Way
Felpham
Bognor Regis
West Sussex
PO22 8EL

Dear Mr Anstiss

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 visits on 30 November and 1 December 2010 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.

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

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

Achievement in economics and business education

Achievement in economics and business education is satisfactory.

- Students' achievements in GCSE business have been weak for the past two years; in 2009/2010 only a small proportion either met or exceeded their target grades. Students taking the vocational alternative business qualification at Key Stage 4 performed in line with expectations. In the lessons observed, students demonstrated levels of attainment that were satisfactory and frequently good. Their current performance is in line with challenging targets.

- In the sixth form, students' achievements in AS business were high in 2009/2010 and show an overall improvement trend over the past four years. However at A Level, students' progress from their starting points on entry was unsatisfactory. Current students in the sixth form demonstrate levels of attainment that are satisfactory and often good; their current performance is in line with appropriately challenging targets.
- In the lessons observed, students made good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning, to undertake research and to complete their course work.
- Students not taking formally assessed business and economics courses develop good economics and business understanding, enterprise skills, and personal financial capability. They enjoy lessons and activities in this area. They are keen to learn more, as they are clear about the relevance of this work to their current and future lives.

Quality of teaching in economics and business education

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

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and a good rapport with their students. They plan lessons with a good range of relevant tasks and activities. These are successful in engaging students' interest and involvement. However, lesson plans do not focus sharply enough on what students will learn by completing the activities. Teachers' planning to provide sufficient challenge for higher attaining students and to support all students in their learning is an area for improvement.
- In the lessons observed teachers used ICT well to support students' learning.
- The marking of students' work is both detailed and thorough. Students receive highly constructive feedback on their performance that is helpful in enabling them to improve the quality of their work. Feedback pays good attention to ensuring that students know their progress towards meeting their target grades.
- In the lessons observed, teachers paid good attention to ensuring that students improve their grades by demonstrating higher level skills such as application, analysis and evaluation. However, teachers' use of questioning to both check and extend students' learning was inconsistent; teachers' questioning frequently did not provide a sufficient check on all students' understanding, and opportunities were missed to extend their learning.

Quality of the curriculum in economics and business education

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

- The curriculum of formally assessed business courses meets the needs of students well. The school has introduced a vocational alternative in business in the sixth form, and students make reasoned arguments for

their choice of course. The proportion of students choosing business at Key Stage 4 is now above the national average.

- There are good, well-managed opportunities for all students to develop their economics and business understanding, enterprise skills, and personal financial capability in subjects such as mathematics, ICT, and design and technology. Thorough planning of provision ensures that arrangements to assess these aspects are sound.
- Leaders and managers also make good provision for economics and business understanding, personal financial capability and enterprise through whole-school enterprise activities. Although students' views contribute to the overall evaluation of such activities, there are no formal arrangements to assess what students have learned from them.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in economics and business education

The effectiveness of leadership and management in economics and business education is good.

- The leadership and management of formally assessed economics and business courses are good. Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision and how it may be improved further. They are sharply focused on raising the rate at which students make progress and the level of their attainment. The monitoring of students' progress is good and students are working towards appropriately challenging targets.
- Leaders and managers have an extremely clear vision for the wider economics and business understanding, personal financial capability and enterprise provision for all students. The provision is structured and coordinated very well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement in formally assessed business courses at Key Stage 4 and at A level
- improving the consistency of lesson planning so that there is a sharper focus on what students will learn from tasks and activities; improving planning to provide sufficient challenge for the higher-attaining students and to support all students in their learning
- ensuring that teachers' use of questioning to check and extend learning is of a consistently high standard in lessons
- putting in place formal arrangements to assess what students have learnt through enterprise activities.

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 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

Russell Jordan
Her Majesty's Inspector