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6 April 2011

Mr D Berry
Principal
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Dear Mr Berry

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 23 and 24 March 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, governors, a representative of the academy's sponsor, a member of the business community and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of parts of 12 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.

- Attainment across all formally assessed business courses is broadly in line with BTEC business awards nationally. This is the case in courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- Given their starting points, the progress students make in their learning on formally assessed business courses is good and sometimes outstanding. Where students show particular aptitude, opportunities are found for them to take higher level qualifications. For example, one Year 11 student has already passed GCE AS business studies.

- As a result of the well-planned whole-school provision, students are very well informed about the world of work, have good awareness of personal financial issues, such as the importance of budgeting and how taxation will impact on them, and have developed excellent enterprise-related skills. Their economic and business understanding is not as well developed.
- The enterprising ethos in the school and the strong emphasis on raising aspirations are having a positive impact on students' outcomes. Students have good and sometimes excellent attitudes to learning. They work very well when engaged in independent and group-based learning activities. They are increasingly articulate and thoughtful and feel confident to ask, and to answer, questions. They see the relevance to real life of the formally assessed courses.

Quality of teaching in economics and business education

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

- All teachers are subject specialists who demonstrate confident subject knowledge. They enrich their teaching by drawing on their varied business backgrounds and frequently relating lesson content to real businesses that are familiar to students.
- All lessons are very well planned. In Key Stages 3 and 4, lessons involve a good range of learning activities that engages and interests students, providing them with plenty of opportunities to learn independently and in small groups. This is less evident in the sixth form. Key Stage 4 students, in particular, say that they really enjoy their lessons.
- Good pace and a variety of learning activities ensure that students make good progress in most lessons. However, in lessons where learning is less successful, pace is too slow or there is too much focus on assignment completion.
- The focus on helping students to understand and meet assessment requirements is very good. Where appropriate, learning is broken down into small steps to ensure that all students are able to successfully develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good. Students find their business teachers to be very approachable and always able to help and give additional support to anyone finding the work difficult.
- Marking is accurate and the quality of written feedback is good, highlighting where key assessment objectives are being met. Students value how this helps them to improve their work in order to meet or exceed the challenging targets they are set. Sixth-form students report some variation in the quality of feedback on their work so they are not always aware of the level at which they are performing.

Quality of the curriculum in economics and business education

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

- As the size of year groups increases, the range of formally assessed economics and business education provision is widened in order to better meet the needs of all students. Currently, only BTEC business is offered as an option at Key Stage 4 but plans are in place to introduce an additional GCSE business group from September 2011. In the small sixth form, there is a realistic offer of GCE A level business studies and the BTEC diploma in travel and tourism. All students in Key Stage 3 have business lessons. The BTEC unit on the world of work brings coherence to work-related learning.
- The direct contact with employers and real enterprises is strong and rapidly increasing. Students' horizons are raised by trips out of school. Teams have been successful in regional enterprise challenges. Imaginative use of funding has enabled students to travel to other European countries. For example, the whole of the Year 10 business group is planning their trip to a partner school in Spain where they will have the opportunity to sell English products.
- Subjects across the school contribute well to students' enterprise capability, while in turn the enterprising ethos has a positive impact across the curriculum.
- In the sixth form, Year 12 students are prepared well for adult life through the Progression Module written by local universities which is an excellent vehicle for developing financial capability.
- In addition to the well-structured enterprise programme, an extensive range of enterprise activities is open to students and organised by the Enterprise Hub group. Businesses and the local community are increasingly brought together by such activities as the recent prom fair.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in economics and business education

Leadership and management in economics and business education are good.

- Senior leaders and leaders of the formally assessed business provision which includes whole-school enterprise education provision, are passionate about, and totally committed to, increasing students' life chances. They aim to do this by ensuring that all students achieve at the highest level, have good employability skills and thus are well prepared for their future economic lives.
- Accurate self-evaluation ensures that leaders know the strengths of the business department and have identified relevant areas for improvement. However, student-voice evidence is currently underused in this process.
- Challenging targets are set for students and rigorous systems for monitoring their progress are in place. These ensure prompt identification of underachievement and appropriate intervention if students are not making good progress.
- Supportive systems to monitor and improve the quality of teaching are in place as part of a whole-school priority.

- The high quality of the school's leaders and managers in both formally assessed economics and business courses and whole-school enterprise education underpins the capacity for sustained improvement in these areas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- promoting greater consistency in the quality of teaching so that all lessons are well paced and engage students
- deploying a greater range of teaching and learning styles in the sixth form
- ensuring a consistent approach to marking and assessment.

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.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector