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Mr K Wilson
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wilson

Ofsted 2011–12 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 14 and 15 September 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; observation of parts of eight lessons and attendance at a departmental meeting.

The overall effectiveness of economics and business education is good.

Achievement in economics and business education

Achievement in economics and business education is good.

- In Year 11, results over the last three years have been at least in line with the national average and, in two of those years, results have been well above average. In Year 13 results are above average.
- The progress of students at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is consistently above average. Value-added measures show a steady increase in student progress at GCE A-level business studies so that the progress students make in this course is very good.

- Currently, it is not possible to measure achievement in students' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to whole-school provision for economic and business understanding because the school does not yet identify the learning objectives and assess students' progress in this area. However, discussion with students revealed that they are well prepared for employment through skills development and careers advice. Students in Key Stage 4 have less well-developed financial, economic and business understanding because recent improvements in the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme have yet to show impact.

Quality of teaching in economics and business education

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

- The vast majority of teaching in formally assessed courses is at least good and some is outstanding. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and this gives confidence to learners. In turn, this leads to very positive relationships ensuring a good pace of work.
- A wide range of teaching and learning approaches was observed including teacher-led discussion, role play and group work. A lot of good learning was developed through teacher questioning, but sometimes this focused more on recall than on challenging and stretching students' understanding.
- Students feel well supported. Teachers are approachable and marking informs students on what they need to do to improve. Subject tutorial sessions are effective but currently limited to the sixth form.

Quality of the curriculum in economics and business education

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

- The range of formally assessed courses offered has been increased to meet the different needs of learners. Students are guided on to appropriate courses. The subject remains very popular.
- There are relatively few opportunities within the formally assessed business studies courses for pupils to engage with the 'real' world through direct contact with employers.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in economics and business education

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

- Leadership brings together a diverse group of staff, several of whom have teaching and management responsibilities in other areas of the school.

This is seen as an advantage and ideas and experience from outside the subject are welcomed.

- Considered self-evaluation and continuing professional development have resulted in a marked improvement in achievement in recent years. This improvement and sustained strong performance in the face of considerable staffing instability, which is now resolved, is testament to the subject's highly effective leadership and management.
- The departmental leader works with the manager for personal, social and health education to improve provision for all students in enterprise. Since the last institutional inspection, good work has been done to provide a well-structured programme. It is too soon to see the impact on student achievement in this area.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending the opportunities for students to engage with real businesses
- ensuring sufficient challenge for the most able at GCSE
- identifying and assessing student outcomes in whole-school enterprise education.

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

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector