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14 October 2011

Dr K Bawn
Headteacher
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Dear Dr Bawn

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 4 and 5 October 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of economics and business education is satisfactory.

Achievement in economics and business education

Achievement in economics and business education is satisfactory.

- In Year 11, results in formally assessed courses over the last three years have increased and in 2011 were very high. At GCE, groups have been too small for meaningful comparisons with the national average, but in 2011 all students passed with half gaining the highest grades.
- Given their starting points, students' progress at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form on formally assessed courses is broadly in line with expectations.
- 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

learning objectives or assess students' progress in this area. However, discussion with students revealed that they are well prepared for employment through skills development and careers advice.

Quality of teaching in economics and business education

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

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and this gives students confidence. In turn, this leads to positive relationships.
- A relatively narrow range of teaching and learning strategies is employed. Some lessons are characterised by too much teacher talk so that students lose interest. Other lessons involve repetitive research activities that lack clear direction or challenge. Teachers sometimes use questioning, but this focuses more on recall than on challenging and stretching students' understanding. As a result, sixth form students report that 'they don't push you' and students do not feel challenged to put in effort or achieve their best. Overall, expectations of students are too low.
- Information and communication technology (ICT), including social media, is used effectively and innovatively to support students' learning.
- In Key Stage 4, students feel well supported and in the sixth form students report that teachers are friendly and approachable so that they feel confident to ask questions. However, too little work is set, its completion is not rigorously monitored and, as a result, students are not clear about how they are doing or what they need to do to improve. In Year 11, subject tutorial sessions are effective and well-received.

Quality of the curriculum in economics and business education

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

- One formally examined course is offered at Key Stage 4 and one in the sixth form. The uptake for each has been small but is now increasing.
- Students have few opportunities within the formally assessed business studies courses to engage with the 'real' world through direct contact with employers. Young Enterprise is used to support learning on the GCE AS economics and business course.
- A good range of provision now supports students' development of enterprise education, including economics and business understanding. All Year 9 students now follow an 18-week enterprise programme. Collapsed timetable days have a strong emphasis on business and enterprise and are supported by major local employers and banks. All Year 12 students receive a programme on personal finance. The personal, social, health and economics education programme is delivered by form tutors with variable impact. There is very good preparation for employment and the world of work, for example all students visit local employers for mock interviews.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in economics and business education

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

- The subject leader has overseen a considerable improvement in results in formally assessed courses in recent years. He creates good ICT-based support for students and has ensured that subject expertise benefits all Year 12 students through the personal finance course. The lack of a coherent policy in practice in regard to teaching the formally assessed courses, results in students having learning experiences that are too variable.
- The department analyses examination results and acts on this information. However, self-evaluation lacks sufficient rigour in monitoring the quality of teaching or students' views.
- Good leadership in the area of enterprise and work-related learning has resulted in the college being accredited and re-accredited as an 'Investor in Work-Related and Enterprise Learning.' The inspection confirms the assessor's view that there is a lot of positive activity but that coherence and progression could be improved.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- extending the opportunities for students on formally assessed courses to engage with real businesses
- increasing the rigour and scope of self-evaluation to improve the quality of provision and students' achievement
- ensuring sufficient challenge for all students taking formally assessed business courses, particularly those in the sixth form, to improve the progress they make
- improving the use of assessment to inform students how well they are doing and how to do better
- identifying and assessing students' 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