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Ms J Millicent
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Millicent

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 21 and 22 November 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; discussion with the headteacher of a partner primary school; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of economics and business education is good.

Achievement in economics and business education

Achievement in economics and business education is good.

- GCSE attainment in business studies has been on an upward trend over the last three years. Examination results are on course to rise much closer to the national average for Year 11 students this year, and their learning and progress in lessons are good. Students' progress in the level 2 BTEC business course has been consistently good and improving.
- Students make generally good progress through a range of courses in the sixth form. The Diploma in Financial Studies is increasingly popular and well-managed with high pass rates. There have been some wide variations in outcomes for the level 3 BTEC business course, but current learning and

progress are good, with some students working to achieve the two-year course in a year.

- Across all accredited courses, students enjoy their work and apply themselves well to their studies. Higher attaining students draw on a range of evidence to inform well-considered analyses of businesses. However, students are not always able to apply the knowledge they are learning to the operation of businesses in a variety of contexts. A significant minority are reliant on the teacher's guidance to lift the quality of their work.
- Across the whole college, students develop a very good underpinning understanding of enterprise, personal finance and the world of work through the college's Learning Challenge, personal, social, health, enterprise and citizenship courses, and the many enterprise-related events promoted through the college's business and enterprise specialism. Less well developed is students' general economic understanding.

Quality of teaching in economics and business education

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

- Teachers delivering formally assessed courses have a high degree of subject expertise and plan very effectively to keep up the pace of learning and students' enjoyment in lessons.
- Teachers' marking of students' work is regular and very thorough. Teachers invest a lot of time in offering students supportive feedback. In BTEC courses, the specific pass, merit and distinction criteria students have met in their work are not always clearly identified. As a result, students are not always fully aware of how to improve the quality of their work independently. GCSE marking is very supportive and helpful.
- The subject is well-resourced, operating as it does out of the well-equipped 'Business Centre'. Students say they have plenty of access to computers for research, so that their work often draws evidence from real businesses, and they have texts readily available for reference.

Quality of the curriculum in economics and business education

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

- There is a rich provision of business, enterprise and financial education across the college. Whole-college programmes have strong themes of enterprise and personal finance running through them. Provision is also mapped through other subjects, and work seen on taxation in a Year 8 mathematics lesson was of a high quality. The development of students' economic understanding is less coherently planned.
- Extensive links with local businesses support whole-college enterprise programmes, valuable student mentoring schemes and work-experience placements for all. There are, however, too few direct business links to support Key Stage 4 formally assessed courses.

- The college's strong involvement in a local post-16 partnership offers good breadth of provision for students and very good 14-19 progression routes.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in economics and business education

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

- Enterprise education is at the heart of the college's values. The college recognises its context in an area of significant business development and is equipping its students well to play their part in this.
- While there remains a strong drive to develop students' enterprise skills across the college, there is no scheme in place to coherently assess the development of these skills as they move through the college.
- The thorough and coherent system of subject monitoring and evaluation linked to clear planning to improve provision is leading to improvements in attainment and progress in business education. Subject self-evaluation is thorough and effective in identifying strengths and areas to improve.
- The department has played a leading role in developing local business education networks, but is not actively engaged in national networks.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening students' ability to apply their knowledge independently to a range of business contexts and extending the links with businesses to support learning on formally assessed courses
- assessing the development of students' enterprise skills as they move through the college
- implementing a programme for the coherent development of students' economic understanding
- ensuring that students on vocational business courses are always clear about how to improve their work to reach higher levels of attainment.

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

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

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector