

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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Dr M Firth
Headteacher
Meridian School
Garden Walk
Royston
Hertfordshire
SG8 7JH

Dear Dr Firth

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: economics, business and enterprise

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 20 and 21 March 2012 to look at work in economics, business and enterprise.

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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of economics, business and enterprise is good.

Achievement in economics, business and enterprise

Achievement in economics, business and enterprise is good.

- Attainment in GCSE and GCE business courses is high. Students make good progress in GCSE and GCE AS courses and excellent progress in GCE A2 courses. The great majority of students achieve their targets and no significant variation exists in the progress of different groups of students.
- Students on formally assessed courses have very good attitudes to learning, and are well motivated and enthusiastic about their studies. They respond well to tasks but, in GCSE courses, are sometimes reticent in posing their own questions and putting forward their own ideas.
- Students across the school, including the sixth form, are gaining good enterprise and employability skills and this makes an important

contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Year 9 students are developing a basic understanding of economics and business through an introductory course taught to all students. However, students not taking GCSE business at Key Stage 4 have a rather patchy understanding of economics and personal finance.

Quality of teaching in economics, business and enterprise

The quality of teaching in economics, business and enterprise is good.

- All business teachers have strong subject knowledge and expertise and they are confident practitioners. Lessons are well structured and good use is made of real-world examples and links with employers, particularly on the applied courses. Classroom relationships are excellent and students feel very well supported in their learning. The marking of written work is accurate and helpful. Students are aware of their target grades and what they need to do to improve. Appropriate use is made of information and communication technology.
- Teachers' oral questioning is inclusive but tends to focus too much on students' factual recall rather than probing to check their conceptual understanding and challenging them to think more deeply. Students are set a good range of tasks, but these are not always sufficiently differentiated to allow students to proceed at different rates according to their level of understanding.

Quality of the curriculum in economics, business and enterprise

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

- Given the relatively small size of the school, an excellent range of business courses is offered, meeting the needs of the overwhelming majority of students. Provision starts in Year 9 with an introductory business course for all students. This not only supports the development of students' basic business understanding but helps them decide on whether they want to take it as an option at Key Stage 4. Around half the cohort takes a BTEC or GCSE business course in Years 10 and 11. GCE business courses in the sixth form have a good take-up and a significant proportion of students go on to business-related courses at university.
- Good provision for enterprise education is made throughout the school; this is delivered through dedicated lessons in Year 9, suspended-timetable days, work experience, and the core curriculum. Additional opportunities are provided through a range of voluntary activities, for example by running events to raise funds for charities. In Year 12, all students take a personal finance qualification and Year 13 students are well prepared for living independently. However, at Key Stage 4 the enterprise curriculum is not fully coherent and specific learning objectives are not identified, leading to some overlap and lack of progression.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in economics, business and enterprise

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

- Leadership and management of formally assessed business courses throughout the school is highly effective. This is reflected in consistently high attainment in examinations, the good uptake of courses and the very positive attitudes of students. An excellent departmental self-evaluation takes account of detailed assessment data, the views of students, lesson observations and students' written work. Appropriate priorities for further improvement are identified and strategies put in place to implement them. Rigorous tracking of students' progress takes place and rapid intervention is made if any underachievement is identified. An effective programme of professional development for business teachers is in place and the department has been awarded the Economics, Business and Enterprise Association's Quality Mark.
- You and your senior leaders see enterprise education as being important and provide strong support for its development. The very wide-ranging provision for enterprise education for all students has been audited as an effective first step to bringing about greater coherence to the curriculum. The various strands of the provision, such as work experience and the enterprise days, are very well managed and are evaluated. However, students' individual experiences and achievements are not recorded and this makes it difficult to evaluate the overall impact of the provision on students' learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing questioning in GCSE business lessons to fully check students' understanding and to encourage them to think more deeply
- developing more effective strategies in GCSE business lessons to enable different groups of students to be taught and make progress according to their level of understanding
- drawing on existing subject expertise to develop greater coherence in the enterprise curriculum and assess the achievements of individual students.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop economics, business and enterprise 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.

Yours sincerely

David Butler
Additional Inspector