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20 October 2006

Mrs J M Pearson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Pearson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 17-18 October 2006 to look at work in business education.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at business studies and economics, the visit had a particular focus on personal finance education for all students.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of documentation; analysis of students' work and observation of three lessons and a whole day enterprise activity for all Year 10 students.

The overall effectiveness of business education is good, with several outstanding features. There is good capacity to make further improvements.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Results in GCSE applied business are above school and national averages.
- Students enjoy their business courses and generally make good progress. Comparatively few students obtain A* or A grades and the department has rightly made this a target for improvement.

- Students, including those not taking business examination courses, are gaining very good enterprise skills and developing a good understanding of business and personal finance.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and make effective use of a range of teaching strategies to engage the interests of learners.
- Lessons proceed at a good pace and students generally remain on task throughout the lessons.
- Students have good attitudes to learning and classroom relationships between students and with staff are very positive.
- In some lessons tasks are not sufficiently challenging for higher attaining students.
- On occasions there are insufficient resources to enable students to fully develop their analytical and evaluative skills.
- Good use is made of new technologies to support learning.
- The monitoring and assessment of students' progress is excellent: students are given very good feedback and know what to do to improve and achieve their targets.
- Students find teachers very approachable in helping them with individual problems.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- There is a substantial take-up of GCSE and BTEC first courses and other students take vocational options which include aspects of business education.
- There is an excellent provision for the wider development of business and enterprise education which is available to all students as part of the core curriculum and through lunch and after school activities. Students speak very positively about these experiences.
- Effective use is made of students' work and enterprise experiences in the GCSE applied business and BTEC courses.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the department are good.

- The quality of documentation and planning is excellent.
- The monitoring of performance is a major strength.
- The head of department has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the subject.
- Staff feel well supported.

- There are very effective links with initial teacher training.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- Business courses are available to all and attract a wide cross-section of students.
- There is excellent individual support for students and there is no evidence of underachievement by any particular group of students.

Personal finance education

There is good provision for personal finance education through the life skills course and the range of business and enterprise activities. The mathematics department is in the process of building aspects of personal finance education into schemes of work. Students are developing a reasonable understanding and grasp of key financial concepts.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring there is sufficient challenge for higher attaining students in business lessons and in other provision for business and enterprise education in the core curriculum
- developing greater coherence in the wider provision for business and enterprise education, including personal finance, in the core curriculum by identifying and assessing the learning outcomes expected of students.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business education in your school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

David Butler
Her Majesty's Inspector