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16 November 2006

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Dear Mr Hepburn

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 09-10 November 2006 to look at work in business education.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at business studies courses, the visit had a particular focus on economic and business understanding and financial capability 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 relevant documentation; analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education was judged to be satisfactory, with many good and some very good features.

Achievement and standards

Standards and achievement are satisfactory.

- Most business studies students make satisfactory progress up to the age of 16 and achievement in the sixth form is good.
- Standards at GCSE are adequate and improving; at Advanced Level, they are much higher and have been consistently good for several years.
- The previous whole-school inspection (2004) found scope for increasing opportunities for higher-attaining students to demonstrate their potential; this remains the case at Key Stage 4.

- Year 12 students on the new Level 2 Business course are making good progress.
- At whole-school level, students are becoming more involved in a wide range of business-related team building and problem solving activities and some of their achievements are very good.
- Students' economic and business understanding is satisfactory and ICT capability is very good.

Quality of teaching and learning of business education

The teaching of business studies is good overall and often very good.

- Lessons are consistently well planned, include a wide variety of learning opportunities and are increasingly well matched to students' needs.
- Relationships between staff and students are excellent.
- Business studies teachers have good subject knowledge and are effective in developing students' knowledge and understanding of business concepts.
- Assessment practice within business studies has improved greatly over the last two years and is now very good; students benefit from a strong focus on assessment and marking is very good.
- At Key Stage 4, comparatively weak literacy skills impede students in applying analytical and evaluative skills consistently, with the effect that very few achieve the highest GCSE grades.

Quality of curriculum

Provision for business education is good.

- Take-up of optional business studies courses is quite low, but the programmes meet the needs of most students who take them.
- The core GCSE programme recently introduced for all students in Year 10 broadens awareness of business-related issues across the year group; the recent introduction of a business element into the personal, social and health education programme is having the same effect in Year 9.
- The Stock Exchange Challenge highlights for students how various events affect major national companies.
- The growing range of enterprise activities throughout the school, for example, links with charities and Year 9 work shadowing, is helping to improve students' team and problem solving skills.
- Other work-related learning, including Year 11 work experience, is increasingly effective in helping students develop their self-confidence and improve their career planning.

Leadership and management of business education

Leadership and management of business education are satisfactory.

- The school's securing of specialist business enterprise status has given business education greater prominence among students.
- Current arrangements for managing the business studies department are temporary, but the acting head of department is providing good leadership; the department is well organised.
- In business studies, very good planning and the strong focus on assessment are contributing increasingly to students' success; schemes of work are sound and quality assurance mechanisms are effective; links with business are good in the sixth form but underdeveloped at Key Stage 4.
- An audit has identified enterprise activities across the curriculum and there is a clear statement to underpin the development of enterprise capability but it is unclear how students' understanding capability is meant to progress as they move through the school.
- Financial capability is at an early stage of development.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory.

- Support for weaker students in business studies has improved over the last two years through a sharpened focus on key terminology.
- Whole school business-related activities are open to all students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- GCSE students should be helped to consistently apply their analytical and evaluative skills, so that some at least can achieve the highest grades, thereby fulfilling their potential
- within business studies, links with local businesses should be further developed, to help Key Stage 4 students improve their knowledge and understanding and enhance their coursework
- at whole school level, there should be greater clarity about the learning outcomes which students are expected to achieve in enterprise education, including economic and business understanding and financial capability, as they pass through the school; these should form the basis for assessing and reporting students' progress in these areas.

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/local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on Ofsted's website.

It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Vic Chivers
Her Majesty's Inspector