

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6644
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr W G Davies
Headteacher
The Marches School and Technology College
Morda Road
Oswestry
Shropshire
SY11 2AR

Dear Mr Davies

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business Education and Mathematics

Thank you for the hospitality and co-operation offered by you and your staff, during the visit of myself and my colleague, Ian Knight, Additional Inspector, on 10-11 October 2006 to look at work in business education and mathematics.

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. 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

Business Education

Inspection activities focused upon an assessment of the strengths and areas for development in the business-related areas of enterprise and financial capability, personal finance education and economic and business understanding.

Overall provision is satisfactory with a number of strong features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- The progress made by pupils in lessons on personal finance and economic and business understanding is at least satisfactory. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a satisfactory understanding of personal finance issues and are very aware of the importance of knowing about these issues for their future economic well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- Pupils are very well behaved, well motivated, attentive, polite, and articulate and show good attitudes to learning.
- Lessons observed were at least satisfactory, with good and outstanding features and all lessons were well structured.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Provision for Business Education in Key Stage 4 was withdrawn in 2006/07.
- The whole school citizenship programme ensures satisfactory coverage of many issues related to enterprise and financial capability and economic and business understanding at Key Stages 3 and 4. In addition, enterprise days and initiatives linked to local businesses provide opportunities for pupils to develop skills and understanding.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- The development of enterprise education and stronger business links is now a whole school priority and the recent appointment of an enterprise officer demonstrates the school's commitment to this.
- Together with the school's provision for work related learning, its developing provision for enterprise and financial capability and economic and business understanding ensure that the Every Child Matters outcome, promoting economic well-being, is well met.

Areas for development, which we discussed, included:

- the reintroduction of business education as an option at Key Stage 4 to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of pupils
- a clear statement of what enterprise education means for the school

- the development of a coherent whole school provision for enterprise education (including financial literacy and economic and business understanding) that involves a clear identification of the learning outcomes for all pupils (at each key stage) and the development of ways to effectively assess these learning outcomes.

Mathematics

The overall effectiveness of mathematics was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Standards at GCSE are consistently well above average, and pupils' achievement is outstanding. Very clear tracking of pupils' attainment enables any in danger of underachievement to be identified quickly and action taken.
- The results of the 2006 National Curriculum mathematics tests for pupils in Year 9 show a significant improvement over 2005 and are above expectations.
- In discussion, pupils were clear that they really enjoy mathematics. In lessons, behaviour is typically exemplary and pupils are keen to answer questions. However, in some lessons, pupils can become passive and not take an active part in the whole lesson.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teaching is good in mathematics throughout the school, its cumulative effect resulting in pupils' outstanding achievement in GCSE examinations.
- Almost all lessons proceed at a brisk pace with good quality explanations followed by carefully written, progressively more difficult questions.
- Computer-linked whiteboards are used effectively to support teaching. Pupils agree that this helps them to do well.
- The department's own self-evaluation has accurately identified a need to amend styles of teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 so that pupils are more actively involved in lessons, and to improve the consistency of questioning to challenge pupils to explain their thinking and thus deepen their understanding.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum for Key Stage 3 is being reviewed, and plans are well advanced to ensure this provides pupils with the right mathematical diet.

- At present, there is no authoritative, written guidance on teaching methods, the use of information and communication technology or on the use of practical and investigative techniques.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- Good leadership and management have assured that high levels of achievement have been maintained and improved even in the face of some staffing difficulties that have had an impact in the past.
- The head of department provides outstanding leadership, is enthusiastic and has a clear vision of a department in which strenuous efforts are made to ensure pupils do as well as they can.
- Good assessment and tracking procedures identify pupils in danger of underachievement, although these do not link directly to the level descriptors of the National Curriculum and do not generate very specific targets that relate to knowledge, understanding and skills for pupils to work towards.
- Formal and informal monitoring of teaching is effective and means that any strengths and weaknesses within the department are readily identified. The resulting action plan includes appropriate priorities and actions.

Subject issue: pupils' enjoyment and understanding of mathematics

Pupils enjoy mathematics because of enthusiastic, good humoured teaching, positive relationships between staff and pupils, and challenging work. They appreciate the clear exposition and examples that they are given in lessons. However, the use of interactive, practical or investigational methods is not widespread, although plans are well advanced to remedy this in Key Stage 3.

Inclusion

The department's tracking system, backed up by the extra lessons available to all who need a little extra help, ensures that there is no widespread underachievement by any groups of pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- make greater use of informal assessment opportunities to ensure that every pupil is challenged at exactly the right level in every lesson and kept actively involved in learning
- ensure that the revised curriculum at Key Stage 3 includes guidance as to what methods might be used, how information and communication technology could support learning and the use of practical and investigative techniques to deepen pupils' understanding.

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

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector