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Mrs Lorraine Barker
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Dear Mrs Barker

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 06-07 March 2007 to look at work in business education.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on economic and business understanding and 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

In the courses provided in business education students' achievement is good.

- In 2006 the A*-C grade pass rate in GCSE business studies declined and was significantly below the national average. The school's analysis of students' performance in Key Stage 4 indicates that in GCSE business studies most students achieve their predicted grades. Boys did not achieve as well as the girls.
- Pass rates in GCE AS and A-level business studies are outstanding. Value added data indicate that students make good progress.

- Students' success on level 3 vocational courses is good and they make satisfactory progress.
- Progression from level 3 courses to higher education is very good.
- Students show good attitudes to learning. In the lessons observed behaviour was exemplary and students were very well motivated.
- Students demonstrate good development in the use of business vocabulary and are able to apply theory and concepts to real business examples.
- The standard of students' coursework is very good. Students tend to perform better in coursework than those units assessed by examination.

Quality of teaching and learning of business education

The quality of teaching and learning in business education is good with some outstanding features.

- Students benefit from teachers' very good subject knowledge and their relevant business experiences. Teachers use a good range of interesting real world examples to maintain students' interest and enjoyment of the subject.
- Lessons are very well planned with clear learning objectives. Well written, very carefully structured and professionally produced worksheets support learning. A wide range of starter activities quickly settles students into the theme for the lesson. Carefully considered plenary sessions reinforce the learning that has taken place.
- Teachers use a wide range of teaching and learning styles with a good mix of teacher led discussions, pair and group work, research and presentations. Very effective questioning techniques are used to develop students' understanding and skills of analysis and evaluation.
- The use of information technology to support learning is underdeveloped.
- Assessment and monitoring of coursework is very thorough. Teachers' comments help students to improve the quality of their written work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- The school provides a good range of business courses to meet the needs and interests of students and the proportion of students taking these courses is high.
- Guidance and support for students are excellent. The process of enrolling and placing students on appropriate courses is thorough.
- Students' progress is very closely monitored. Regular homework and tests are used to identify students who are under performing and additional support is provided at lunchtimes and through the after school business studies club.

- Enrichment activities, including visits to local businesses, involvement in competitions and the use of outside speakers is satisfactory. The school recognises the need to make more links with local employers to provide students with first hand experience of the real business world.
- A good range of opportunities including work experience, enterprise and industry days, citizenship work and raising funds for charity provide opportunities for students to engage in enterprise activities. A pilot project to develop students' financial capability has been trialled in mathematics with the support of a school governor.
- The assessment and monitoring of learning outcomes for enterprise education, including personal finance is underdeveloped.

Leadership and management of business education

The leadership and management of business education are outstanding.

- Self evaluation is excellent and clearly identifies the strengths and areas for improvement.
- The strategies to address weakness are proving effective.
- Good practice in teaching and learning is shared through formal and informal lesson observations and regular team meetings.
- The school has rightly identified the development of enterprise education as an important priority and is using the expertise of business studies staff to develop appropriate activities.

Inclusion

- Vocational and academic business studies options are available to all students in Key Stage 4 to meet a wide range of needs and interests.
- The school's sixth form is open and inclusive with around half of the students enrolling from other local schools. A level 2 vocational course is available for those students who do not meet the entry criteria to study a level 3 course.
- Teachers know their students well and carefully plan a range of teaching and learning activities to meet their needs.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- develop the use of information technology to support students' learning in and out of the classroom
- increase links with local businesses to enrich courses and provide first hand experiences for students on vocational courses
- identify clear learning outcomes for enterprise education and ways in which students' progress will be assessed and monitored.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business education in the 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

Bev Barlow
Her Majesty's Inspector