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Mr Christopher Lewis
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Dear Mr Lewis

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 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 without their consent. 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 parts of eight lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

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

- Across the range of courses offered, examination results are usually above national averages and students generally reach and often exceed their expected grades. Results in 2006 show particularly good progress in GCSE business studies and the GCE applied A level.
- Students have good attitudes to learning and are well motivated.

- Classroom relationships are good and students are very positive about the subject.

Quality of teaching and learning of business education

The quality of teaching and learning in business education is good.

- Students benefit from teachers' expert knowledge and the use of relevant and interesting examples drawn from their own experiences.
- Teachers deploy a wide range of teaching and learning styles, including teacher-led discussion, group work and presentations. In the sixth form, information technology is used effectively, both for research and for student presentations.
- Students feel well supported and are made aware of how to improve their work through helpful written comments and oral feedback. Guidance for students is very good.
- Teaching does not always take sufficient account of the varied needs and abilities of different learners.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- Courses in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are popular and provide students with opportunities to achieve well. The two GCE courses in business cater well for the different needs and interests of advanced level students, but there are currently no business courses offered at levels one and two in the sixth form.
- Currently, there are relatively few opportunities within the business studies courses for pupils to engage with the 'real' world through direct contact with employers.
- There are good opportunities in the curriculum for students not following examination courses in business to develop their economic and business understanding. Students take part in a wide range of enterprise activities that include making an effective contribution to the local community and raising substantial funds for good causes. The school fosters an environment that supports student enterprise.

Leadership and management of business education

The leadership and management of business education are good.

- Courses are very well structured and the strengths of the well qualified staff complement each other.
- Resources are good and meet the needs of the range of learners.
- The wider area of business, and enterprise education is well led and effectively coordinated by a senior manager.

- The newly created role of enterprise coordinator is proving very effective in developing a more coherent approach to planning and monitoring the provision for business and enterprise education.
- A clear and useful whole school policy for business and enterprise education is in place.
- Departmental self-evaluation is carried out annually. It has many strengths but the views of students are not gathered systematically.
- Some students feel that where classes are shared between staff, communication between the teachers involved could be improved.

Subject issue - personal finance education

Provision is satisfactory.

- Students have opportunities to develop an understanding of personal finance. All Year 9 students participate in 'the real game' and they spoke enthusiastically about what they had learned as a result. Year 10 and 11 students cited 'the real game' as their chief learning opportunity for financial capability.
- There has been some coverage in the personal, social and health education programme. The school is actively pursuing partnership arrangements with a bank to enhance pupils' learning in this area.

Inclusion

- The curriculum in the main school has been audited to ensure that all students get their full entitlement to the broad range of economic, business and financial education.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teaching consistently matches the needs of different groups of learners and provides challenge for the most able
- providing more opportunities for students to engage directly with local businesses
- implementing the good plans that are in place for enterprise and other areas of business and economic understanding, including personal financial education.

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/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

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector