

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr S O'Neill
Headteacher
Bungay High School
Queen's Road
Bungay
Suffolk
NR35 1RW

Dear Mr O'Neill

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 1-2 May 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 ten lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in GCE examination courses is good.

- GCE A2 examination results are well above average. Given the starting points of many students, this represents outstanding achievement. Students with modest GCSE results achieve particularly well.

- Too many students in the past have been ill-matched to the requirements of the GCE AS course, resulting in them either not completing the course or failing to achieve a pass grade. The situation appears to have improved in the current Year 12.
- Students have very good attitudes to learning and are well motivated.
- Classroom relationships are very 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 the real world.
- Teachers deploy a wide range of teaching and learning styles, including teacher-led discussion, group work and presentations. Information technology is used effectively by teachers and students, both for research and for presentations.
- Students feel well supported and are made aware of how to improve their work through helpful written comments and oral feedback.
- 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.

- The GCE course is popular and successful. There is a wide range of business related and vocational courses at levels one and two in the sixth form and in the main school.
- Currently, there are relatively few opportunities within the business studies course for students 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 and take part in a wide range of enterprise activities.
- Careers education is taught as a separate subject. It prepares students very suitably for the world of work.
- Aspects of personal financial education are covered very well through mathematics. All Year 11 students benefit from the money week and the many opportunities taken to link numeracy to the real world. In the sixth form an accredited course in finance gives a more rigorous course for those who choose it.

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.
- The recently created role of enterprise coordinator, combined with subject leadership in business studies, is proving very effective in developing a more coherent approach to planning and monitoring the provision.
- A clear and useful whole school policy for business and enterprise education is in place. The school is working with an external consultant to develop assessment. This work is at an early stage of development and it is too soon to see its full impact.
- Departmental self-evaluation is strong. Key areas for improvement have been identified and appropriate plans have been put in place.

Inclusion

- There is a wide range of business related and vocational courses available to and appropriate for students of all abilities.
- Whilst there are many enterprise and work-related activities available to students, their take up and impact is not sufficiently monitored or assessed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teaching consistently matches the needs of different groups of learners and provides sufficient 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, ensuring that the experience of students is monitored and assessed.

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