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Mrs Allen
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Dear Mrs Allen

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13-14 June 2007 to look at Whitley Abbey School's 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 five lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement on examination courses is good.

- In business studies, students generally make good progress given their starting points and perform well on GCSE and GCE courses compared to many other subjects. However, examination results are well below national averages and few students achieve the highest grades.
- At Key Stage 4, the progress of some business studies students is impeded by weak independent learning skills.
- At whole-school level, achievements in the growing range of enterprise, team building and problem solving activities are good. Students' economic

and business understanding by the end of Key Stage 4 varies but is satisfactory overall.

Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in business studies are good; teaching is often very good.

- Business studies teachers have good subject knowledge. Lessons are consistently well planned and most include a wide variety of learning opportunities.
- The pace of business studies lessons is good. More able students respond well to being stretched.
- Teachers' expectations are high, but weak basic skills mean that a significant number of students struggle to meet these.
- Teachers give strong emphasis to developing students' understanding and the use of technical vocabulary.
- Assessment practice is good; there is an appropriate focus on students' understanding the course grade criteria; the best marking provides both clear judgements and helpful comments to encourage students to improve. Students benefit from clear target setting and monitoring of their progress.
- Students' files are not of a consistent standard; some are well managed, but others are not well presented.
- Students have excellent access to information and communication technology (ICT) and many make effective use of it, including for research.
- In business studies, good use of classroom displays promotes high achievement.
- Behaviour in lessons is very good and relationships between staff and students are very positive. However, some students find it difficult to sustain concentration and remain engaged.

Quality of curriculum

The provision of business courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is good.

- The growing range of enterprise activities across the school is helping to improve students' team and problem solving skills.
- Good quality business-related initiatives recently introduced at Key Stage 3 are helping to raise awareness of business and personal finance issues.
- The citizenship course provides good opportunities for students to develop financial awareness; more vulnerable students also have additional opportunities to develop personal finance capability on the Independent Learning and Work Readiness and Preparation programmes.
- Year 10 work experience is effective in helping students develop a range of work-related skills and improve their career planning; logbooks are particularly effective in helping students to articulate and record their learning.

- Subjects, such as graphics, geography, history, ICT, religious education and mathematics are contributing positively to promoting economic and business understanding.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of business studies are good.

- Effective planning and review mechanisms are in place overall; however, the current business studies development plan has too many priorities.
- In business studies schemes of work, intended learning outcomes are not consistently made explicit.
- There are some good links with local businesses, but there is room for these to be further developed.
- Staff make good use of local networks and attend a wide range of training. Opportunities are taken to broaden awareness of, and to share, effective teaching and learning strategies.
- At whole-school level, an audit has been carried out of where subjects and other activities contribute to the development of enterprise capability. However, progress has been limited in mapping how students develop economic understanding and financial capability as they move through the school. Systems for tracking the outcomes achieved by individual students are not yet in place.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- Good support for weaker students in business studies is provided through extra support sessions and mentoring.
- Business studies courses are open to all students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- giving more attention to helping students improve their independent learning skills, thereby improving their self-confidence and capacity to fully access the curriculum
- developing more links with local businesses to help students taking business courses improve their knowledge and understanding and make learning more relevant
- putting in place procedures to map and track students' progress in developing economic and business understanding and financial capability as they move through the school.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business education in your college. 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

Vic Chivers
Her Majesty's Inspector