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Mr G Toogood
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Dear Mr Toogood

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 14-15 June 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.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in examination courses is good.

- Standards in A2 business studies are broadly average and in GCSE are above average. Results have improved in recent years.
- Students generally make good progress in both courses.
- 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, individual and paired 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.
- Teachers are very approachable. The combination of extra revision classes and individual support throughout the course enables students to do well.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- The range of enterprise provision is excellent. There are opportunities for all students to gain enterprise skills starting with the productive and imaginative links with primary schools and continuing through each year into the sixth form. In addition to the comprehensive enterprise activities involving all students, teams of students have enjoyed regional success in programmes such as Young Enterprise and other competitions.
- Currently, there are relatively few opportunities within the GCSE and GCE business studies courses for students to engage with the 'real' world through direct contact with employers. However, students are able to draw on such links from the wider enterprise provision to assist their business studies learning. In the sixth form attendance at revision conferences and study visits to urban centres are highly valued by students.
- The school is expanding its relatively narrow provision of business studies examination courses to include an applied course in the sixth form. From September all Year 10 students will follow a business related GCSE course.
- There are very good opportunities in the curriculum for students not following examination courses in business to develop their economic and business understanding, through a well structured personal education programme. This is supplemented by aspects of personal financial education taught through mathematics. Students not taking an examined course in business education have a good knowledge and understanding of interest rates and the dangers of debt. External partners play a valuable role in supporting students' preparation for adult life.

- A clear and useful whole school policy for business and enterprise education is in place. The school is working with partners to develop assessment. Some piloting has already taken place but this work is at an early stage of development and it is too soon to see its full impact.

Leadership and management of business education

The leadership and management of business education are good.

- Courses are very well organised and the strengths of the well qualified staff complement each other.
- The quality of teaching and learning has improved through the sharing of good practice and through lesson observation. Newly qualified teachers are supported well. More experienced staff seize opportunities to investigate good practice and widen their repertoire of ideas through courses, conferences and visits to other schools.
- Monitoring of student performance is improving but there is a need for more rigour in identifying underachievement earlier.
- Staff have received training in enterprise education. As a 'hub' school training is provided for other schools in the region.
- Departmental self-evaluation is strong. The faculty has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Key areas for improvement have been identified and appropriate plans have been put in place. Although students are involved in the audit process, systems do not exist to include them in departmental self review.
- The recent steady rise in results provides evidence of the good capacity to improve further.

Inclusion

- There are many enterprise and work-related activities available to students. All students have an entitlement to a well planned programme.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- implementing more systematic and earlier monitoring of student progress to trigger earlier intervention
- implementing the 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 more rigorously.

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