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Mr J Hughes
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hughes

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 27 - 28 September to look at work in business education.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit had a particular focus on the business studies department but also looked at 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 seven lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in examination courses is outstanding

- The department has a consistent track record of success.
- Results in GCSE business and communications systems and in GCSE business are well above average. The majority of students exceed their target grades and the hard work of the department ensures that some less motivated students do very well in the subjects.

- At A level, students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment and attain results that are in line with those found nationally. Students with modest GCSE results make particularly good progress.
- Students have excellent attitudes to learning and are well motivated. Classroom relationships are excellent 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 outstanding.

- There is consistently high quality teaching across the department.
- Teachers display very strong subject knowledge and an excellent understanding of examination requirements.
- Students are very well supported and are prepared well for examinations.
- Application of theory to business contexts and case studies brings the subject alive. The use of visits and visitors from the world of business adds relevance to students' learning.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- A variety of courses meet the needs of different interests and abilities of groups of students in Years 10-13. These courses are popular and successful.
- There are very good opportunities for all students, whether or not they follow an examination course in business, to gain an understanding of enterprise and the economy. There is progression in the enterprise activities each year. Teams have been very successful in enterprise competitions. There are good links with businesses.
- Students in Year 11 follow a course in economic understanding as part of the programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education. The quality of delivery of the course is variable. The school does not monitor or assess students' learning in the wider aspects of economic understanding.

Leadership and management of business education

The leadership and management of business education are outstanding.

- The department is very well led. It has been built up over several years and demonstrates a consistent pattern of success. There are very good resources and excellent accommodation. The impact of leadership and management are reflected in the excellent achievement of students.

- A business education specialist is providing effective leadership for enterprise and economic understanding.
- Courses are very well organised and the strengths of the well qualified staff complement each other.
- Departmental self-evaluation is strong. The department has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Key areas for development have been identified and appropriate strategies have been put in place to bring about improvement. Although students feel staff to be very approachable, systems do not exist to include them in departmental self review.

Inclusion

- There are many enterprise and work-related activities available to students. All students have an entitlement to a choice of courses. In the sixth form, the level 2 course has provided additional opportunities for students to successfully progress to level 3 courses.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the experience of students in enterprise and other areas of business and economic understanding 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