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Mr Stephen Ball
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ball

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16-17 October 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 and observation of four lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in examination courses is satisfactory.

- GCSE results are below average. Most students achieve in line with expectations but a large minority are not reaching their targets.
- At advanced level, students make satisfactory progress in relation to their prior attainment and achieve examination results that are broadly average.

- In the sixth form students generally have positive attitudes to learning and lessons observed were productive. In Years 10 and 11, some students are easily distracted from their work.

Quality of teaching and learning of business education

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

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding
- Students value the feedback they receive on their written work and say that teachers are approachable and helpful out of class.
- In the less successful lessons, teachers use too limited a range of teaching and learning approaches and students spend too much unproductive time on computers. As a result, students often become bored and easily distracted.
- Whilst examples of real businesses are used in lessons, students taking applied courses have insufficient direct contact with businesses and employers.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in business education is satisfactory

- Only one business studies course is available to meet the needs, interests and abilities of different groups of students in Years 10 and 11. In the sixth form, in addition to the GCE applied business course, a National Certificate level 2 qualification in business has recently been introduced to meet a wider range of needs.
- There are satisfactory 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 considerable variation in how well these aspects are taught. Most are not assessed, so teachers do not know what learning has taken place. The exception to this is the unit of work on understanding finance which is assessed in detail.

Leadership and management of business education

The leadership and management of business education are satisfactory

- Self-evaluation in business education is weak. The department does not draw on evidence that extends beyond an analysis of examination results to identify its strengths and areas for development.
- Students have access to good quality computer based resources to support their learning outside of the classroom. Additional 'catch up' lessons have been provided following the temporary disruption to teaching caused by maternity leave.

- Students feel well supported. Communication between teachers is satisfactory, so that they know what aspects of a course each is covering.
- Insufficient use is made of professional development and monitoring of teaching to develop an understanding of what makes good teaching in business education.

Inclusion

- All students have enterprise education opportunities and follow an understanding finance module. The GCSE business course is open to all students. The newly introduced National Certificate level 2 course in Year 12 extends opportunities for students to proceed to GCE.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the quality of teaching by increasing the range of teaching and learning approaches, forming and using links with the real world of business and making courses more interesting
- developing more rigorous evaluation of the work of the department that goes beyond the analysis of students' examination performance
- developing greater coherence in the programme for business and enterprise education for all students and identifying the learning outcomes expected at each key stage.

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