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Mr A Cooper  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Cooper

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 - 27 September 2007 to look at Business Education in your school.

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 is good. The provision of examination courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is very good and students achieve well. However, provision at Key Stage 4 for work-related learning is unsatisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement on examination courses is good.

- Standards at GCSE are well above those nationally and the percentage of students achieving A/A\* grades has improved year-on-year since 2004. At GCE A level, standards have been consistently well above those nationally for several years. Unvalidated A level results for 2007 show students achieving as well as in other subjects, but point to a dip in overall standards.

- Independent learning skills are variable; many business students make effective use of ICT, but the quality of note-taking to aid revision is often poor.
- Completion rates for sixth form business courses are very good.
- By the end of Key Stage 4, students' economic and business understanding relies heavily on individual interest and learning out of school, and varies widely. It is sometimes outstanding and is satisfactory overall. Among sixth formers, it is good.

### Quality of teaching and learning

Teaching and learning on examination courses are good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge. Lessons are consistently well planned, proceed at a good pace and often include a good variety of learning opportunities.
- Teachers' expectations of students are generally high. The most able students respond well to being stretched. Teachers place strong emphasis on developing conceptual understanding and using technical vocabulary. Behaviour in lessons is very good, as are staff-student relationships.
- There are few opportunities for students to visit local businesses and, in Year 10 GCSE courses, insufficient focus on helping students develop and master evaluative skills.
- Assessment practice is satisfactory. The best marking provides both clear judgements and helpful comments to encourage students to improve; however, there is variability.
- A good range of business journals is available in the school library.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the business-related curriculum is satisfactory overall. Provision of business courses is very good. However, at Key Stage 4 opportunities for work-related learning for students who do not take a business course are very limited.

- GCSE business studies is gaining in popularity, with around half of students taking the course.
- The Year 8 personal, social and health education programme provides good opportunities for students to develop financial awareness, but this is not being built upon at Key Stage 4. The Year 12 enrichment programme helps students gain a good understanding of financial issues in preparing for higher education.
- The Year 10 enterprise day provides a good opportunity for students to develop their team and problem-solving skills. Young Enterprise gives Year 12 students a good insight into business planning.
- Work-related learning at Key Stage 4 does not take sufficient account of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority guidance on the provision for

economic and business understanding and enterprise education; this is recognised in the current school development plan. Year 11 work shadowing is not taken up by all students and does not provide sufficiently challenging opportunities to develop and practise work-related skills.

- Personal, social and health education, ICT, geography, the Year 12 enrichment programme and Year 12 charity week are contributing positively to promoting economic and business understanding.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management of business education are satisfactory.

- Effective planning and review mechanisms are in place in business studies; the current action plan has clear priorities.
- Business studies schemes of work are over-reliant on awarding body specifications; but, in their implementation, there is a strong focus on ensuring good quality teaching and learning.
- The two business studies teachers support each other well; however, there are insufficient opportunities for staff to network with colleagues in other schools.
- At whole-school level, an outline audit of where subjects and other activities contribute to economic understanding and financial capability has been carried out. However, the particular skills and competences which students are expected to acquire as they move through the school are not currently specified and there is no system in place for tracking the outcomes achieved by individuals. Links with businesses are unstructured and underdeveloped; students have few opportunities to meet with local employers.
- Recent appointments to improve the leadership and stability of the business studies department and to improve the co-ordination of work-related learning are positive developments, but it is too early to judge the impact of these changes.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory.

- Students with English as an additional language achieve well.
- Support for students experiencing difficulties in business studies is currently being improved through extra sessions, the development of peer mentoring and the provision of additional materials.
- Business studies courses are open to all students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- in Year 10 business studies, increase opportunities for students to develop evaluative skills
- in business examination courses, improve the guidance on taking notes intended to aid revision
- improving opportunities for students to visit local businesses as part of business examination courses
- providing more opportunities for Key Stage 4 students to demonstrate their enterprise and work related skills; put in place procedures to track students' developing economic and business understanding and financial capability and improve links with employers.

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

Vic Chivers  
Her Majesty's Inspector