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Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 05-06 February 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 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 good.

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in examination courses is good.

- In 2007 standards and achievement in business and economics courses were satisfactory. In the sixth form, the numbers entered in either subject were too low to make meaningful comparisons with national averages. Progress based on previous attainment was satisfactory. In previous years achievement in business courses has been good and inspection evidence indicates that students currently taking courses in the sixth form and those taking the new course in Year 10 are making good progress.

- Classroom relationships are very good and students generally have positive attitudes towards the subjects.

Quality of teaching and learning of business education

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

- The teaching observed during the inspection was never less than satisfactory, often good and sometimes outstanding. Students benefit from teachers' expert knowledge and the use of relevant and interesting examples drawn from the real world. Students find their courses enjoyable and interesting.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers deploy a wide range of teaching and learning styles, including discussions, individual, paired and group work, role plays and presentations. Teachers frequently check students' knowledge and understanding and do much to help them develop their self-confidence.
- Students feel well supported and are made aware of how to improve their work through helpful written comments and oral feedback.
- Although teaching is generally good, the extent to which students are fully engaged and supported is inconsistent.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- Examination courses meet the needs and interests of students well. The courses offered are popular and students are positive about them.
- Currently, there are relatively few opportunities within the business studies courses for students to engage with the 'real' world through direct contact with employers.
- There are very good opportunities in the curriculum for students not following examination courses in business to develop their economic and business understanding and take part in a wide range of enterprise activities. Humanities, mathematics and science courses all contribute significantly to developing students' economic understanding and financial capability. An increasing range of vocational courses link students' learning to the business world.
- The assessment of students' economic and business understanding and financial capability is underdeveloped, although some aspects are assessed through the recently introduced GCSE course in citizenship.
- Some students have been very successful in business competitions, including a group of Year 11 students who recently won an area competition for business planning.

Leadership and management of business education

The leadership and management of business education are good.

- Departmental self-evaluation is strong. Key areas for improvement have been identified and appropriate actions have been put in place to address them.
- Students' progress is monitored closely and appropriate interventions are made when they are identified as underachieving.
- You and other managers have a strong commitment to the development of business and enterprise education across the school as a way of promoting students' economic well-being and raising achievement. Plans are in place to bring about greater coherence to this area of the curriculum.

Inclusion

The promotion of inclusion is good.

- There is an appropriate and wide range of business-related and vocational courses available to students of all abilities.
- Enterprise and work-related activities are available to all students but their take-up is not sufficiently monitored and their impact is not sufficiently assessed, so that the school is not aware of what understanding and skills students are developing.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teaching consistently engages and supports students
- providing more opportunities for students to engage directly with local businesses
- having a coherent overview of the knowledge, skills and understanding students are expected to gain in business and enterprise education across the school and develop better systems to monitor and evaluate their progress.

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