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19 May 2008

Ms G Cheshire
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Cheshire

Ofsted survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on 14-15 May 2008 to look at work in business education.

As outlined in our initial letter, as well as looking at examination courses in business education, the visit also considered the development of economic and business understanding and financial capability for all students at Key Stage 4 as part of the statutory provision for work-related learning.

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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education was judged to be satisfactory with good capacity to make further improvement.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- GCSE business studies results have been below national averages for the past two years, reflecting the prior attainment of students taking the course. The attainment of students currently taking business is satisfactory.
- Students make satisfactory progress, with girls achieving better than boys.

- Students have very positive attitudes to their business courses. Behaviour in the lessons observed was excellent.
- Students not taking business courses are developing a reasonable grasp of basic economic and business concepts, and personal financial understanding.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning are good.

- The business teacher has good subject knowledge.
- Good use of the interactive whiteboard was made by the teacher in both of the business lessons observed and there was evidence in students' coursework of effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to investigate businesses and to present ideas.
- The teacher deployed a good range of teaching styles in the lessons observed to engage students and maintain their interest.
- Students enjoy their business lessons. They feel well supported and find the teacher accessible and helpful.
- Students receive good feedback on their written work and, as a result, know how to improve.
- Students taking GCSE business studies have had few opportunities to engage directly with employers but these are much better developed in the vocational course introduced in Year 10.
- In the lessons observed, students' understanding of key ideas was not always sufficiently checked and the use of questioning in the development of learning points was under-developed.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The introduction of the vocational business course meets the full range of students' needs.
- There are well established opportunities for students to study aspects of business education in performing arts and ICT provision.
- There is a good alternative curriculum to meet the needs of a small number of students who have difficulty coping with the normal curriculum that includes extended work experience and college placements.

Leadership and management of business education

Leadership and management are good.

- The department has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development.
- The head of business has taken appropriate action to bring about improvement in achievement and standards, such as the introduction of the vocational business course.

- The monitoring of students' progress is good.
- There is good co-ordination of the wider provision for business education within citizenship and personal, social and health education. Students' achievement is assessed in individual units of work against identified learning outcomes but there is no overall evaluation of their progress in developing economic and business understanding and financial capability.

Subject issue: the provision for economic well-being and financial capability

- There are good opportunities for students to develop their economic and business understanding, and financial capability.
- Thorough auditing has given the school a comprehensive overview of current provision and where it is taught; however, there is insufficient development of basic economic and business concepts through subjects.
- The Year 10 enterprise day was very well received by students.
- There is strong senior management support for the promotion of economic well-being and financial capability as part of the review of the whole school curriculum.
- Work experience is well organised, but opportunities are missed to link the students' experience to the curriculum.
- The school is well placed to implement the new curriculum for economic well-being and financial capability from September 2008.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- The business course is available to all students.
- All students have opportunities to develop wider business and economic understanding, for example through enterprise and interview days.
- There was some under-achievement by boys in GCSE business in 2007.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards and achievement in business courses
- developing questioning to check students' understanding and to develop learning
- strengthening the understanding of basics economic concepts through subjects.

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 and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Russell Jordan
Her Majesty's Inspector