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Mr I Gartshore  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Gartshore

Ofsted survey inspection programme – business education and English

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Roderick Passant on 23-24 June to look at work in business education and English.

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.

#### Business education

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 satisfactory.

#### Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in examination courses is satisfactory.

- In 2007 standards in business and economics courses were average. Results in GCSE business studies were a little below average but were an improvement on previous years. Results in GCSE economics were well below average. Students attain well in applied courses.
- Students' progress and achievement in relation to their prior attainment is satisfactory.
- In the sixth form, attainment is broadly average and achievement is satisfactory.

- The business studies course in Years 7-9 currently has insufficient impact on improving students' economic and business understanding by the end of Year 9 or on raising standards in business examination courses taken in Years 10 and 11.
- Classroom relationships are generally good and older students have positive attitudes towards their business education courses.

### Quality of teaching and learning of business education

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

- The teaching observed during the inspection was good in three of the seven lessons and satisfactory in the rest. Students benefit from teachers' confident subject knowledge and many students find their courses enjoyable and interesting.
- In the less effective lessons, the tasks set were the same for all students in the class, resulting in insufficient challenge for higher attaining students and a lack of engagement by lower attaining students. The range of teaching approaches was too narrow in some lessons, resulting in students not being fully involved in their learning.
- Teachers provide helpful feedback to students on how to improve their work. This is particularly evident in skills based courses. However, the quality of written assessment is inconsistent.
- Appropriate use is made in some lessons of computers, for example, for student presentations and business simulations. However, students on some courses complain of spending too long on computers and would prefer a wider range of learning activities.

### Quality of curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- The wide range of courses provided meets the different needs and interests of students well. The courses offered are popular and students are positive about them. All students follow a business-related course in Years 7 to 11 and the school is therefore well placed to deliver the new economic well-being and financial capability programme of study from September.
- Students are able to go on visits which are relevant to aspects of their business courses. However, these are 'one off' trips and there are relatively few opportunities within the business courses for students to engage with the 'real' world through direct contact with employers.

### Leadership and management of business education

The leadership and management of business education are satisfactory.

- The leadership of the department is self-critical and has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement.
- All business teaching is delivered by specialists. However, the quality of teaching and learning across the department is variable. Opportunities for professional development in improving teaching have been limited.
- The school is rightly reviewing the course for Years 7 to 9 to improve opportunities to develop enterprise and financial capability.

Areas for improvement in business education, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teaching consistently challenges, supports and actively engages students in their learning
- providing more opportunities for students to have direct contact with local businesses
- restructuring the Key Stage 3 course so that learning outcomes are clear and progressive and that activities are designed to fully engage students.

## English

The overall effectiveness of English at Key Stage 3 was judged to be satisfactory. The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work in lessons and observation of five lessons.

### Achievement and standards

Standards are average and achievement in English at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory

- Results in 2007 dipped after three years of improvement but are broadly average overall. Progress was satisfactory. The percentage of pupils gaining level 6+ is below the national average.
- Girls do better than boys in English but both boys and girls perform close to the national average for their gender.
- Standards of speaking and listening are in line with expectations. Higher attaining pupils are confident and articulate. They listen carefully to points put forward by their peers or teacher and respond to them. Other pupils are confident to make a point but tend not to listen to each other to the same degree. Pupils are able to use formal rather than casual speech when answering questions.
- Pupils spoken to enjoyed reading and could name favourite authors. However, pupils perform less well on the Shakespeare paper and have difficulty commentating on the author's intention in test questions. Writing is often presented well and is fluent and accurate. Older pupils can write empathetically and well to explain a character's motives.

- The impact of English on pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Behaviour is satisfactory. Pupils accept the tasks set and generally want to please but are often not intellectually or personally engaged enough in the activity to make better progress.

### Quality of teaching and learning of English

The quality of teaching and learning of English at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory.

- Teachers are confident, have good subject knowledge, display energy and enthusiasm in classrooms and prepare well. They know the pupils and have friendly relationships with them.
- Teachers target questioning to individuals well although they do not always challenge or follow up the answers sufficiently. Talk in the form of pair work is often encouraged. Yet despite these strengths, learning and progress in lessons is often satisfactory rather than good because the emphasis is on the delivery of the content of the lesson rather than ensuring pupils' engagement and understanding.
- Where teaching is good, there is the implicit expectation that pupils will engage and genuinely participate. In these lessons, teachers have encouraged pupils to assume a greater responsibility for their learning and given them the opportunity to do so. Pupils become partners in their learning and they make good progress as a result.

### Quality of curriculum

The curriculum in English at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory.

- Pupils experience a good range of poetry, plays and texts and write in a variety of styles. Units of work include information and communication technology (ICT) and study of the media.
- Reading is encouraged well within the department and across the school although there is significant variation between tutorial groups in actual book issues from the library. Various school events such as Readathon, Book of the Week and the summer reading project promote independent reading. The curriculum is enhanced by a Year 9 theatre trip, the creative writing and reading club, and revision clinics.

### Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management of English at Key Stage 3 are satisfactory.

- There is close involvement of senior management in supporting the department and in the analysis of results. Departmental self-evaluation tends to inflate the department's performance rather than give an objective view based on national data. The head of department undertakes structured monitoring and discussion with staff members.
- The department tracks pupils' progress against their targets but does not amend targets in the light of their progress.

- This year the Key Stage 3 co-ordinator has worked to develop and tailor the curriculum in line with the new framework. The department needs to assess how effectively it promotes effective learning and accelerates pupils' progress.
- Displays across the English suite do not reinforce consistent approaches to fostering pupils' achievement.

Areas for improvement in English, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the department analyses performance data effectively and amends pupils' targets in the light of their progress
- fostering pupils' independent learning skills so that they take more responsibility for their learning
- using display across the department to reinforce common expectations and approaches aimed at raising pupils' achievement.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business education and English 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 Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons  
Her Majesty's Inspector