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Mr J Tomsett  
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Dear Mr Tomsett

Ofsted survey inspection programme – business education and science

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Ian Richardson HMI and Katrina Gueli on 08-10 July to look at work in business education and science.

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 good.

### Achievement and standards

In the examination subjects provided in business education students' achievement is good.

- In most of the courses offered, standards are very high. The exception in 2007 was GCSE business studies where exam results were poor. Achievement is good overall. It is outstanding in the sixth form and in the business and communications course in the main school. Overall, students make good progress in relation to their prior attainment in Key Stage 4 and post-16 courses, particularly in the GCE applied course.

- Business subjects are popular and students are very positive about them. Their attitudes and behaviour are very good. Students have good attitudes to learning and are well motivated. Classroom relationships are very good and students are very positive about their business courses.

### Quality of teaching and learning of business education

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

- The school's monitoring records show that the majority of specialist business lessons are at least good and evidence gathered during the visit confirms this judgement. Students benefit from teachers' expert knowledge and the use of relevant and interesting examples drawn from their own experiences. Teachers deploy a wide range of teaching and learning styles, including teacher-led discussion, group work and presentations. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively, both for research and for student presentations.
- Students feel very well supported and are made aware of how to improve their work through helpful written comments and oral feedback. Guidance for students is very good.
- Teachers are very approachable. The combination of extra revision classes, such as the 'business breakfasts', and individual support throughout the course enables students to achieve well.
- Less effective lessons sometimes failed to fully engage learners as they involved too narrow a range of teaching and learning approaches.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in business education is outstanding.

- The take-up of business courses at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is good. The two GCE courses in business cater very well for the different needs and interests of sixth form students and the re-introduction of economics will provide a further choice at A level.
- At Key Stage 4, the business and communication studies course is extremely popular and evidence from the school indicates it is particularly effective in meeting the needs of boys and raising their achievement.
- There is a strong emphasis on using the real world of business in all courses. Useful visits take place, especially in the applied course, and these help to bring the subject alive.
- Provision for enterprise education and the wider aspects of economic and business understanding has improved dramatically since the last institutional inspection in 2006. For example, good work was observed in an exciting and enjoyable Year 9 enterprise day. Students were enthusiastic and felt they had benefited from a programme in financial capability provided by a major insurance company. Year 8 students

learn about adult life through 'the real game'. Increasing opportunities are provided for all students to develop economic and business understanding.

- Learning outcomes are still being developed for enterprise education and economic and business understanding and there is not yet a coherent programme in place.

## Leadership and management of business education

The leadership and management of business education are good.

- Courses are very well structured and the strengths of the well qualified staff complement each other.
- There has been good professional development aimed at improving the quality of business teaching. The subject leadership provides support and training and this has been supplemented by relevant external courses.
- Resources are good and meet the needs of the range of learners.
- The wider area of business and enterprise education is well led and effectively coordinated by a team of managers. A meeting reviewing work experience provided an excellent example of partnership work with external organisations. There is a useful curriculum map showing enterprise opportunities and staff with responsibility for personal, social, health and economic education have reviewed the curriculum in the light of the new programmes of study for September 2008. They have identified some gaps and amended the provision accordingly. The school is therefore well-placed to deliver the new curriculum in this area.
- Departmental self-evaluation is carried out annually. It has many strengths but the views of students are not yet gathered systematically.

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

- improving the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning across specialist business courses to that of the best to raise achievement further
- developing greater coherence in the programme for economic and business understanding and enterprise education, identifying the learning outcomes expected at each key stage and the progress students make in achieving them.

## Science

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

### Achievement and standards

Standards are significantly higher than the national average by the end of Key Stage 4. Achievement is good.

- Students' attainment on entry to the school is slightly above the national average.
- They make good progress during Key Stage 3 and by the end of Year 9 they reach standards that are significantly above average. In 2006 standards reached were exceptionally high.
- Standards by the end of Key Stage 4 in double award science are also significantly above average, as is the proportion of students gaining the highest grades.
- All Year 11 students in 2007 gained a GCSE in science which is evidence of the inclusive nature of the school. This is also seen in the progress made by pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities especially at Key Stage 3.
- Current school data from the tracking of student attainment indicates good progress in the majority of year groups. This was also seen in the lessons observed where progress was always at least satisfactory and frequently good.
- Rates of students' progress in the sixth form are not, however, as good as in the main school. While pass rates and retention rates are good, nationally recognised progress measures indicate that achievement is satisfactory in biology and chemistry but lower in physics and the recently introduced course in applied science.
- Students' behaviour was generally good particularly when teaching was good.

### Quality of teaching and learning of science

Teaching and learning are good.

- In all lessons observed the teaching was at least satisfactory, much was good and some was outstanding.
- The students have very positive views of the quality of teaching they receive. This was particularly strong in the sixth form.
- Weaker teaching seen was characterised by lower levels of engagement and less active involvement of students.
- Some good use of ICT was seen for presenting information. There were fewer examples of ICT being used interactively with students.
- Assessment is systematically carried out and well recorded. The standards of marking and the use of formative written comment are variable. There is, however, good practice to build on.

## Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provided is satisfactory.

- The curriculum provision in science is being reviewed as part of the whole-school curriculum development agenda set by the senior leadership team.
- There is a thorough and systematic approach to the development of the new Key Stage 3 course which is involving the whole department.
- The curriculum planned is diverse, based on relevant and engaging contexts and different pathways, for example, either two or three years for Key Stage 3 are being considered.
- The move to courses in three separate sciences in Key Stage 4 is to be introduced in September 2009.
- There is no course of applied science in Key Stage 4 but one is offered at A level in the sixth form.

## Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- The senior leadership team has provided a good environment for developing the science provision.
- The department is very well managed and the leadership is strong and respected by staff.
- The management team in the science department is effective and they share the same vision for effective science education.
- The whole department is involved in developing courses and producing schemes of work that are detailed and supportive but not constraining.
- There is very effective communication in science, allowing a flow of information and ideas across this large department

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards and achievement in the sixth form, particularly Physics and Advanced Applied Science, to build upon the successes of Key Stages 3 and 4 more effectively particularly
- reviewing the science curriculum available to students, particularly in Key Stage 4, to ensure there are suitable pathways available for all students
- improving the information in schemes of works to support teachers working with students with a range of attainment and securing cross-curricular links.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business education and science 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