

15 July 2008

Mr S A McConaghie
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Dear Mr McConaghie

Ofsted survey inspection programme: business education and the introduction of the revised national curriculum

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during the visit by Christopher Russell HMI and myself on 30 June - 1 July 2008.

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. A separate visit took place on the 1 July to look at the way in which the school has prepared for the introduction of the revised national curriculum in Year 7 from September 2008.

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 a range of lessons.

Business Education

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- GCSE business studies results have been above average in each of the last three years. The attainment of students currently taking business is good, and they make good progress relative to their starting points.

- The attainment and progress of students in the sixth form are good in GCE and BTEC courses.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their business courses. Behaviour in the lessons observed was excellent and students were thoroughly engaged in stimulating and challenging tasks.
- Business students demonstrated a good level of attainment and independent learning skills in lessons.
- Students not taking business courses are developing a good grounding in economic and business concepts, and personal financial understanding.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding features.

- Business teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- Students enjoy their business lessons. They value very highly the good level of support they receive from teachers.
- In the business lessons observed, teachers checked students' understanding of key ideas carefully and used questioning extremely well in the development of learning points.
- Teachers employed a good range of teaching styles in the lessons observed, successfully engaging students and maintaining their interest.
- Lessons were exceptionally well planned to meet the needs of all learners; there was outstanding use in business lessons of the interactive whiteboard and other resources to support students' learning.
- Students receive good, detailed feedback on their written work and their progress towards their target grades; as a result, they are very clear on how to improve. They value the opportunity to agree challenging target grades with their teachers.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- There is a very wide range of business courses in the sixth form to meet students' interests, learning styles and prior attainment.
- Business courses are available to all students.
- Business provision at Key Stage 4 meets individual students' needs well, accommodating their different learning styles and the wide range of their prior attainment.
- There are good opportunities to engage with local businesses and employers.
- The continuation of citizenship, and personal, social and health education into the sixth form through the 'Horizons' programme is highly valued by students.

Leadership and management of business education

Leadership and management are good.

- The department has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development; there is a strong culture of continuous improvement.
- The head of business has taken appropriate and well-considered action to bring about continuing improvement in achievement and standards, such as targeting students currently underachieving for additional support, and ensuring that coursework is completed to a standard that at least matches students' target grades.
- The monitoring of students' progress towards challenging target grades is good, and appropriate interventions are made where there is under-achievement.

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.

- There is good planning and co-ordination of the wider provision for business education within citizenship and personal, social and health education. Students' achievement is assessed against identified learning outcomes but there is no overall evaluation of their progress in developing economic and business understanding and financial capability.
- 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.
- All students have opportunities to develop wider business and economic understanding, for example through enterprise and interview days.
- The Year 9 enterprise day was very well received by students and provides a very effective taster activity for those students considering choosing business as an option at GCSE.
- The school has a comprehensive overview of current provision and where it is taught. There are examples of very effective collaboration between subjects to develop basic economic and business concepts. However, the school is aware that there is scope to monitor more rigorously the development of economic and business understanding in subjects.
- Thorough planning has enabled the school to be very well placed to implement the new curriculum for economic well-being and financial capability from September 2008.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- maintaining the focus on raising students' achievement in the sixth form in A level business
- fully implementing plans to monitor more rigorously the development of the understanding of basic business and economic concepts in subjects, and to spread good practice in the collaboration between subjects.

Planning for the introduction of the revised national curriculum at Key Stage 3

Planning and preparation for the introduction of the new curriculum into Year 7 in September has been outstanding.

- The process began over a year ago. Leaders carefully considered a range of ways to implement the revised curriculum before making a final decision. Planned changes were very well-considered to ensure that the new curriculum meets the needs of students very closely.
- Subject leaders have a thorough understanding of the aims of the new curriculum and the changes in their subject areas. Staff are enthusiastic about the opportunities that the revised curriculum provides. Significant amounts of time and money have been made available to enable staff to plan thoroughly for the changes.
- Over the past two years the school has introduced a programme to develop students' personal learning and thinking skills. This programme is currently running in Years 7 and 8 and has already had a positive impact on the ability of these students to learn effectively. Detailed plans are in place to develop this programme further as part of the introduction of the new curriculum in September.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business education in the school and introduce the new Key Stage 3 curriculum in September.

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