

11 November 2008

Mr M Feldman
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Feldman

Ofsted survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 22-23 October 2008 to look at work in business education.

As outlined in my 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 and the introduction of the new programme of study for economic well-being and financial capability at Key Stage 3.

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.

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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students' attainment on entry to Year 10 is below average, but as a result of the good progress they make in business education, the standards they reach at the end of Key Stage 4 are broadly average. Less able students and those on BTEC courses make particularly good progress. In the sixth form, students also make good progress.
- Students demonstrate good understanding of business concepts and are able to apply their knowledge to practical and real world issues very effectively.

- Students have good attitudes to learning, their behaviour in lessons is excellent and they are able to work productively both independently and in small groups.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Good and improving achievement overall is the result of excellent teaching and learning, including very effective monitoring and feedback, support strategies and well designed assignments.
- Teachers consistently have very high expectations of behaviour in lessons and encourage high aspirations; all students are expected to contribute to discussions, to make presentations and to demonstrate enterprising skills.
- According to students, learning is 'fun' and this is the result of very well paced, highly innovative and very student-centred teaching and learning activities that effectively engage and challenge all students.
- There is a strong emphasis on developing students' independent learning skills and other skills, such as working effectively in teams, which contribute to promoting their future economic well-being. There is a very good emphasis on contextualising learning with real work examples and scenarios and a particularly strong focus on students 'finding out' rather than 'being told'.
- Assessment is very good; assignments are well designed and the formative feedback provided is excellent. There is a strong focus on students' self and peer assessment, which works very well and contributes to students' improving achievement.
- Students are very positive about their business education courses. They like team and independent work and have a good understanding of the benefits of both. They feel self-motivated and responsible for their own learning. They enjoy the variety of practical activities and rate very highly the support they receive from their teachers.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The numbers of students on business education courses has grown steadily over the last three years and trends suggest that the school is on target to exceed their specialist college targets by 2009.
- The good vocational and academic mix at Key Stage 4 ensures that provision meets the needs of all students very effectively.
- The introduction of the Level 2 BTEC course in understanding enterprise in the sixth form is encouraging students to remain in education. The BTEC National course meets the needs of those whose preferred learning styles favour coursework and, for the first cohort of students completing the GCSE at Key Stage 4 in 2009, there will be progression to a GCE course that is mainly assessed through examinations.
- Extra curricular business education activities are developing well and are supported by a very good range of whole school enterprise opportunities.

Business links are developing well but students' work experience is underused as a context for learning in business education.

- Specialist college status in business and enterprise is having a significant impact on the school, with business and enterprise activities becoming increasingly embedded across the curriculum. The creation of a range of school businesses is providing an excellent focus for this activity.
- Activities to promote students' economic well-being are clearly embedded within the curriculum at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Excellent learning opportunities are provided particularly in relation to the enterprise and financial capability strands and this is reflected in students' good understanding in both these areas.
- Learning outcomes are clearly identified for individual enterprise activities but there is as yet no overarching scheme of work for economic well-being and financial capability across all year groups.

Quality of leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The committed, enthusiastic and highly skilled subject leader is having a significant impact on the quality of business education provision, which is leading to improving outcomes for students.
- Highly effective processes for monitoring and reviewing both students' progress and provision is leading to on-going improvement.
- Departmental self-evaluation is rigorous, it clearly identifies strengths and areas for development and is informed by highly effective contributions from students.
- The clear vision of developing confident, independent learners with transferable skills is highly appropriate and is being developed successfully as a result of the excellent teaching and learning strategies that are deployed.
- Highly effective sharing of good practice takes place.
- There is a coherent view of business education in the school that includes both the formally examined and assessed business education courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and the whole school provision for economic well-being and financial capability at Key Stages 3 and 4.

Areas for consideration:

- developing an appropriate progression route in the sixth form for those following GCSE business courses in Years 10 and 11
- improving the use made of students' work experience as a context for learning in business education
- developing an overarching scheme of work for economic well-being and financial capability across all years, identifying related learning outcomes and developing appropriate methods of assessment.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the provision for business education in your 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

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector