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Ms C Browne
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Dear Ms Browne

Ofsted survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18-19 November 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 eight 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.

- In GCSE business in 2006/07 students made satisfactory progress, but in 2007/08 their progress was below average. This was reflected in examination results that fell further behind the national average.
- In A level business courses students' standards are broadly average and students generally make satisfactory progress from their starting points on entry to the course.
- Students consistently demonstrated well-developed information technology and research skills in the lessons observed.
- Students not taking business courses are developing a good grounding in economic and business concepts, and personal financial understanding.

Quality of teaching and learning of business

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Business teachers have good subject knowledge and a good rapport with their students.
- Teachers used information communications technology well to enhance learning in most of the lessons observed.
- Students on business courses receive feedback on their work that is insufficiently precise and regular to enable them to know exactly what they need to do to improve it and what progress they are making towards their target grades.
- In the business lessons observed, there was insufficient checking of students' understanding of key ideas and the use of questioning to extend their learning was under-developed.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The introduction of the vocational business course at Key Stage 4 and the applied course in the sixth form meets the full range of students' needs.
- Business courses are available to all students and are a popular choice at Key Stage 4. The numbers taking business courses in the sixth form have fluctuated in recent years but there is currently a good take up of the Applied AS level course.
- There are well-conceived plans with other local schools and the further education college to develop the business curriculum further by making provision for the new diploma in business, administration and finance, and additional vocational courses.
- Good provision is made for economic and business understanding and personal financial capability through the personal, health and social education programme in the main school and the general studies programme in the sixth form.

Leadership and management of business education

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The leadership and management of business studies examination courses are satisfactory. The school has a clear view of the strengths and areas for development in business courses. Appropriate strategies are in place to bring about improvements but it is too soon to assess the full impact of these.
- Strategies to monitor students' progress on business courses and to intervene where there is under-achievement are at an early stage of development.
- Thorough auditing is giving the school a comprehensive overview of current provision for economic well-being and financial capability. However, there is as yet insufficient co-ordination of the work being done across subjects to develop basic economic and business concepts.
- Leaders and managers of the wider economic and business provision for all students have a clear understanding of how this provision may be further improved.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards and achievement in business courses
- developing questioning techniques in business courses to check students' understanding and develop their learning
- ensuring that students on business courses receive more detailed and regular feedback on how to improve the quality of their work and on their progress towards their target grades
- strengthening the co-ordination of the work being done through subjects to develop students' understanding of basic economic and business concepts.

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

Russell Jordan
Her Majesty's Inspector