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Mr J Reilly
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Reilly

Ofsted survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11-12 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education was judged to be good with outstanding features and excellent capacity to make further improvements.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good with some outstanding features.

- Achievement and standards in business studies courses are outstanding.
- GCSE business studies results have been consistently high. Students make good progress in relation to their prior attainment and perform more strongly in business than in their other subjects.
- Students taking the BTEC business course at Key Stage 4 attain above average results; this represents very good progress relative to their attainment on entry to the course.

- Students' standards and achievement in business courses in the sixth form are outstanding, with a very high proportion attaining top grades. Students make exceptional progress in relation to their prior attainment.
- Business students consistently demonstrated a good level of attainment and independent learning skills in the lessons observed.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their business courses. Behaviour in the lessons observed was very good and students were thoroughly engaged in stimulating and challenging tasks.
- 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 good with some outstanding features.

- Students receive exceptionally detailed and thorough feedback on their written work and their progress towards their target grades. As a result, they are very clear on what they need to do to improve and complete additional work in response to teachers' feedback.
- Students value the opportunity to agree challenging target grades with their teachers and find the regular feedback on their performance against these targets to be highly motivating.
- 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 know their students well and match their questions skilfully to individual students' attainment.
- Teachers employed a good range of learning activities in the lessons observed, successfully engaging students and maintaining their interest.
- Business teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- Students enjoy their business lessons and value very highly the good level of support they receive from teachers.
- Lessons were exceptionally well planned to meet the needs of all learners.
- Limited facilities restrict the use made of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning in some lessons.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good with some outstanding features.

- There is an excellent range of examination courses in business at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form to meet students' interests, learning styles and the wide range of prior attainment extremely well.
- Business courses are available to all students and are a popular choice at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- There are well-conceived plans to develop the curriculum further with local schools and the further education college, by making provision for the new diploma in business, administration and finance and additional vocational courses.
- There are good opportunities to engage with local businesses and employers.

- Arrangements to support and develop gifted and talented students in business are good and are firmly embedded in the curriculum.
- Provision for economic and business understanding and personal financial capability is good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form; it is highly valued by students. School leaders and managers are implementing well-conceived and appropriate plans to develop this provision in Key Stage 3 and to further improve the existing provision at Key Stage 4.

Leadership and management of business education

Leadership and management are good with some outstanding features.

- The leadership and management of business studies examination courses is outstanding.
- The business department has a very clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development; there is a very strong culture of continuous improvement and a highly-developed team ethos, placing the learner at the heart of what they do.
- The monitoring of students' progress towards challenging target grades is exceptionally good; appropriate interventions are made and support provided where there is under-achievement.
- 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 and how it will be developed at Key Stage 3. Well-conceived plans are in place to strengthen the co-ordination of the existing provision and develop students' understanding of basic economic concepts through subjects.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- further developing ICT facilities to enable teachers to use them more effectively to enhance teaching and learning
- maintaining the focus on strengthening the co-ordination of the provision for economic well-being and financial capability for all students and developing further the understanding of basic economic concepts through subjects.

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