

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Ms J Shepard
Headteacher
Beechwood School
Long Readings Lane
Slough
Berkshire
SL2 1QE

Dear Ms Shepard

Ofsted survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 03-04 March 2009 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 schools/colleges will not be identified in the main text.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education, including support to develop students' economic well being was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards and achievement are good.

- Business studies students performed very well in the 2008 public examinations. Most students make very good progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students with English as an additional language make excellent progress.
- Students demonstrate good ability to learn independently over time.
- Students not taking business examination courses develop good economic and business understanding and financial capability, but there is substantial variation between students.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- The very good progress made by most students in business studies reflects the high quality of the teaching. In lessons to promote economic and business understanding more generally across the school, teaching and students' engagement is often good, but is more variable.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning in business lessons.
- Business studies teachers have very good subject knowledge and are confident in their teaching. They deploy an appropriate range of styles that effectively engage students and meet most of their needs. Effective use is made of information technology to support teaching and learning where appropriate.
- Appropriate emphasis is given in business studies to developing students' understanding of key terms and technical vocabulary. This is especially effective in supporting the learning of students with English as an additional language. Lessons proceed at an appropriate pace and good and skilful questioning challenges students' thinking. At the end of lessons, teachers check students' learning and reinforce key points.
- Teaching in many subjects makes good and effective use of real world examples. Business studies students have limited opportunities to visit local businesses but, where they are provided, they give students positive and memorable experiences.
- Business studies students are able to express their ideas confidently in discussion, work co-operatively as part of a team and are supportive of each other. The students receive good and useful feedback on their work and the tracking of students' progress towards achieving their targets is very good.

Quality of the curriculum

The overall quality of the business-related curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is inclusive and the school focuses strongly on developing students' self-esteem. There are excellent opportunities for students to take responsibility and the response to these is very good.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is particularly strong. All students take vocational courses and these make an effective contribution to developing students' economic well-being, including enterprise capability.
- There are many good opportunities for students to develop their economic and business understanding and financial capability in Years 9-11 and plans are in place to extend these to other year groups during 2009. The Preparation for Working Life programme is helpful in promoting financial literacy.
- Enterprise days provide good opportunities for students in Years 8-10 to develop their team working and problem solving skills.
- The Key Stage 3 'Elite Learners' programme effectively promotes independent learning and individual responsibility and promotes economic and business understanding through the use of vocational contexts.

- Year 10 work experience helps students improve their understanding of the world of work. There is a strong focus on developing work-related skills during placements and debriefings provide an opportunity for this learning to be consolidated.
- In the sixth form, the enrichment programme effectively promotes enterprise and financial capability.

Leadership and management of business education

Leadership and management of business education are good.

- The business studies department has a good record of success in raising standards. The quality of self-evaluation is very good and there are realistic strategies for improvement. Departmental planning is good and appropriate schemes of work are in place. There is effective monitoring of staff performance. Staff development needs are identified appropriately and followed up.
- Co-ordination of the provision to develop students' economic and business understanding and financial capability across the school is well managed by a member of the senior leadership team. An audit of provision across the curriculum has recently been completed at Key Stage 3 and a similar one for Key Stage 4 was conducted several years ago. Some learning outcomes are assessed, but there is currently no overall system in place for doing this for all aspects of economic and business understanding and financial capability.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- updating the audit of the Key Stage 4 curriculum to determine all the areas which support the development of students' economic and business understanding and financial capability
- drawing together the various ways of tracking and monitoring the progress students make towards economic and business understanding and financial capability as they move through the school.

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/local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Vic Chivers
Her Majesty's Inspector