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Mr R Burke
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Burke

Ofsted survey inspection programme: business education and mathematics

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during our visit on to look at work in business education and mathematics on 12-13 May 2009.

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.

Business education

As the school does not provide any examination courses specifically in business studies, the visit focused on the wider provision the school is making to develop students' enterprise capabilities and their understanding of economics, business and personal finance.

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 two lessons.

The overall effectiveness of the provision made to develop students' enterprise skills and understanding of economics, business and personal finance was judged to be good.

Main findings

- Students develop a reasonable understanding of economics, business and personal finance by the end of Year 11. For example, they appreciate the difference between a credit and debit card, understand different forms of taxation and know how profits are calculated.

- Students develop good enterprise skills through undertaking a range of simulations and real activities during their time in school and through extra-curricular provision.
- All students at Key Stage 4 take examination courses designed to help prepare them for work and develop their enterprise skills. Students enjoy these courses and can identify the skills and understanding they have developed. Evidence presented by the school indicates that students are making good progress on these courses and likely to achieve well.
- Students are provided with many opportunities in Key Stage 3 to develop their enterprise skills and their understanding of economics, business and personal finance but this does not yet add up to a coherent curriculum as specific learning objectives are not identified.
- There are some excellent opportunities for some students to develop their enterprise skills and understanding of business through initiatives such as the work with the Harlequins rugby club. These are worthy of extending to a wider group of students.
- There is a very well organised programme of work-related learning at Key Stage 4, including two weeks of work experience for all students. The work experience is followed up when students return to school and contributes directly to their examination courses.
- The school is making a good attempt to embed business and enterprise education across a range of subjects. However, in the two lessons observed the learning outcomes in terms of economic and business understanding were not made sufficiently explicit.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- making the provision at Key Stage 3 to develop students' economic, business and financial understanding and their enterprise capabilities more coherent by identifying the overall learning outcomes they are meant to achieve
- ensuring that the intended learning outcomes for economic and business understanding are made explicit in lessons where they are meant to be developed through subjects.

Mathematics

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 the subject, mathematics, was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in mathematics is good. Standards are above average.

- Students arrive at the start of Year 7 with standards which, overall, are average or a little above average. They make satisfactory progress during

Key Stage 3, although the department's assessment evidence for students currently in Years 8 and 9 indicates that some in lower ability groups are making insufficient progress whilst many in higher groups are exceeding expectations.

- Students make good progress in Years 10 and 11. Standards at GCSE are above average and rose significantly in 2008 with 64% attaining Grade C or better and nearly a fifth the highest grades A* or A. Whilst the proportion gaining at least Grade C is similar for boys and girls, more girls, nearly a quarter, attained the highest grades A* or A in 2008.
- Achievement of the most able is good with a small number each year attaining success in GCSE additional mathematics. Some also enter statistics, which is offered as an optional subject, and most attain at least Grade C. The department is rightly reviewing its use of early entry in mathematics as it seeks to increase the proportion who attain the highest grade, A*.
- Students generally enjoy mathematics and like being challenged. They appreciate opportunities to discuss work and to be actively engaged in lessons. Year 8 students spoke of lessons being fun. One said, 'Teachers make work interesting by using games.' The behaviour of most students is exemplary, although a few less motivated students in a minority of classes sometimes disrupt lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning of mathematics

The quality of teaching and learning of mathematics is good.

- The quality of teaching varies widely within this small department, which has experienced some difficulty in recruiting teachers to all posts in recent years. However, staff work well together and all, including temporary teachers, are encouraged to engage students in a good variety of stimulating mathematical activities. Where appropriate, classes rotate teachers during a year to ensure all have opportunities to work with the more experienced teachers. Continuity is also aided by an experienced learning support assistant, who has recently gained a higher level qualification in supporting mathematics.
- Students experience much outstanding teaching which is very effective in increasing their conceptual understanding. They are encouraged to work collaboratively, to explain their reasoning and to address each other's misconceptions through discussion. Excellent use is made of mini-whiteboards, both to display answers to the teacher and to carry out rough calculations. In two outstanding lessons observed, when teachers spotted incorrect responses they very effectively used other students to explain the errors to their peers. As one Year 11 student said, 'Teaching others is good, because it helps to confirm the work in your head.' Some use is also made of larger whiteboards placed on tables. These 'thinking tables' give students a better opportunity to explain long and protracted calculations to one another and have been particularly successful when engaging in revision topics and in supporting the additional mathematics group in Year 11.

- Computer-linked whiteboards are used effectively. Some students use information and communication technology (ICT) in projects that give them opportunities to use and apply their mathematics. One Year 8 student spoke enthusiastically about a project on reducing road accidents.
- Assessment is very rigorous with students' progress tracked carefully through regular unit tests. However, systems of self-assessment, such as 'traffic-lights,' are not used consistently by all teachers.

Quality of the mathematics curriculum

The quality of the mathematics curriculum is good.

- New schemes of work are being developed. Some of these, as yet, provide little more than an outline framework with hyperlinks to appropriate sections in the textbook. Others, however, contain a good variety of activities from a range of sources. The department has fully adopted a variety of rich activities encouraged through the National Strategy as well as piloting projects which enable students to apply their mathematics in real-life situations. Good use is made of ICT with students accessing appropriate websites for homework and to aid revision. However, other aspects of ICT, such as graph plotting packages, are used infrequently.
- In the past, some abler students have entered GCSE mathematics at the end of both Years 9 and 10. Whilst some results have been encouraging, the department is reviewing this practice to ensure all students achieve the highest grades in mathematics, whilst giving an opportunity for some to study additional mathematics during Year 11 at the same time.

Leadership and management of mathematics

The leadership and management of mathematics are good.

- The head of department is a very effective manager. He is ably supported by an experienced teacher who has gained advanced skills status in the last two years. Together they have enabled the department to embrace a variety of initiatives whilst addressing the effects of difficulties in recruiting staff.
- Senior and departmental leaders have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the department as a result of formal reviews and regular observation of lessons. Students' opinions are sought as part of these reviews. However, the department's self-evaluation evidence tends to be descriptive, rather than evaluative.

Subject issue: the effectiveness of the school's approaches to improving the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics

- Senior leaders are closely focussed on raising achievement in the school through improving the quality of teaching. Within mathematics, they have embraced national initiatives and through the training of an advanced skills teacher have adopted strategies encouraged by the National Centre

for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics. Ideas are effectively shared between teachers who are willing to take appropriate risks with their teaching, but not all of which are fully successful. They have put together a wealth of photographic and video evidence of good practice which is used effectively to train other teachers, both within and beyond the department. Plans are in place to address the issue of recruitment through training new teachers within the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raise attainment further, particularly at Key Stage 3, to ensure all students achieve well
- continue to develop the breadth and depth of best practice within the department so that all students experience outstanding teaching and learning on a regular basis.

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

David Butler
Her Majesty's Inspector