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2 October 2009

Mr G Mitchell
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Mitchell

Ofsted survey inspection programme – business education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit, on 28 and 29 September 2009, to look at work in business education.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the impact of 14–19 developments in business education.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

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 13 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education, including the development of students' economic and business understanding and financial capability is outstanding.

Achievement in business education

Achievement in business education is outstanding.

- Attainment in business education courses at both GCSE and GCE level is high.
- Most students make good progress and some make exceptional progress. This was confirmed in the lessons observed during the visit.
- Success rates for post-16 students are high, with almost all students successfully completing the courses they begin.

- Students' attitude to learning and their behaviour in lessons is mostly excellent. Their ability to work independently is impressive. They work very productively in pairs or small groups when grappling with problems and complex questions.
- Students at Key Stage 4, who are not following examined business education courses, and students at Key Stage 3 have a very good understanding of basic economic and business issues and the impact that these have on their own and their families' lives. They are developing valuable knowledge and skills in relation to financial capability.

Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching in business education is good.

- All teachers are subject specialists and demonstrate a real passion for teaching their subjects.
- Teachers deploy a wide range of teaching strategies, which engage students' interest and encourage high-quality learning.
- Effective use is made of computing facilities, particularly for students following coursework options.
- Very good real-world contexts are used to enable students to relate theory to practice and thus to promote greater understanding.
- Teachers give excellent support to students and, as a result of the good feedback they receive, students know their targets and how to improve their work.
- Lesson structures are good and effective use is made of starter activities to recap previous learning. However, plenaries are sometimes rushed and students are not always encouraged to reflect sufficiently on their own understanding and learning.
- Questioning does not always challenge students sufficiently or include them effectively. Sometimes teachers talk too much rather than encouraging students to contribute more effectively. These issues are identified as priorities in the whole-school improvement plan.
- Where teaching is outstanding, the pace is fast and teachers are prepared to take risks. Skilful questioning challenges all students to think deeply and contribute ideas without fear of being wrong. In such situations, input from the students dominates the lesson and the teachers' role is to steer, prompt and guide.

Quality of the curriculum in business education

The quality of curriculum in business education is outstanding.

- The range of courses meets the needs and interests of all students exceptionally well. It includes traditional academic courses, applied and vocational courses, those which are assessed via coursework and others that are assessed via examinations.
- There are clear progression routes for all students between Key Stages 4 and 5.

- Business links are particularly good where coursework is involved, providing good real-world contexts for investigation and for learning. There are many opportunities for students to engage in enrichment activities, including business competitions.
- Provision for all students to develop economic and business understanding and financial capability is excellent at Key Stages 3 and 4. The programmes are thoughtfully and creatively conceived and delivered by specialists. They ensure provision is engaging and valuable in developing appropriate skills and knowledge. The success of this provision can be seen in the large numbers of students who opt for examinable business education courses at Key Stage 4 and their subsequent success.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in business education

Leadership and management in business education are good.

- The Business and Commercial Subjects Faculty has an excellent track record in relation to students' attainment at Key Stages 4 and 5.
- Self-evaluation at faculty level is good and results in a clear plan for further improvement. However, evaluation does not draw sufficiently on the wide range of evidence that is available, for example from the extensive feedback from students, detailed analysis of data and findings from learning walks.
- Good staff development opportunities exist. Teachers are encouraged to undertake external awarding body training and in-house training and mentoring support. Arrangements to share good practice between the large team of business education teachers are excellent.
- Students are set challenging targets. Their progress is monitored and, where underperformance is identified, highly effective interventions take place to ensure students achieve at least as well as predicted.
- You and the senior leadership team provide an exceptionally strong steer to the school's business and enterprise specialist work. This is translated into a very clear vision and an exceptionally coherent provision for economic and business understanding and financial capability. Specialists provide a highly effective steer to the structure of the provision and a strong input into the teaching. Appropriate learning objectives have been identified throughout the provision and methods of assessing students' progress are firmly in place.

Subject issue: the impact of 14–19 developments in business education

The school already has excellent provision to meet the needs and interests of all students aged 14 to 19. Plans for the business, administration and finance Diploma are at an early stage of consideration within the local area.

Areas for development, which we discussed include:

- ensuring that questioning is always challenging and encourages greater and more in-depth thinking and contributions from all students

- developing the rigour of self-evaluation at faculty level by using all sources of evidence to ensure more challenge in improvement plans.

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