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Mrs S Graham  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Graham

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 3 and 4 November 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 to 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 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, including the development of students' economic and business understanding and financial capability is good.

Achievement in business education

Achievement in business education is satisfactory.

- Attainment, as indicated by examination results, is in line with that nationally. Achievement is satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Given their starting points, students in the sixth form make good progress.
- In economics, attainment is below that nationally, but improving at Key Stage 4; learning and progress are satisfactory.

- Success rates for post-16 students are good.
- There is no major underachievement by any specific group of learners.
- Students have good attitudes to learning and behaviour in lessons is very good. However, notably in Years 10 and 11, the ability of many students to learn independently is underdeveloped.
- Students not taking business examination courses develop good economic and business understanding and financial capability.

#### Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching in business education is good.

- Most teaching is good and none is inadequate.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are confident in their teaching.
- Lessons are planned very well and teachers use an appropriate range of styles that engage students effectively and meet their range of needs.
- Skilful questioning challenges students' thinking and teachers reinforce key terminology well.
- Effective use is made of information and communication technology to support teaching and learning where appropriate.
- Teaching is often linked to real-world examples.
- Students are supported well in their learning and receive good feedback on their work, so they know the progress they are making and what is needed to improve. However, feedback to help students develop skills of analysis and evaluation lacks consistency.
- Students enjoy their work and most are keen to improve.

#### Quality of the curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- Examination courses meet the needs of the majority of students.
- Students, particularly those taking applied or vocational business courses, have good opportunities to engage with local businesses and employers.
- There are many good opportunities for students to develop their economic and business understanding and financial capability. For example, personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship, work experience and the wide range of enrichment activities make significant contributions to these.
- Although they are temporary, the effectiveness of the current leadership and management arrangements for business education is good.
- The department has a good recent track record of raising standards and achievement in business studies.

- Self-evaluation is strong and draws on a range of evidence.
- Effective plans are in place to bring about further improvement. Departmental planning is strong. However, schemes of work are not well-developed and do not consistently identify learning objectives and opportunities for differentiation.
- There is good monitoring of staff performance and strong support for staff, including good opportunities for professional development.
- Students are set challenging targets. Their progress towards achieving these is monitored closely and interventions are made appropriately when there are signs of underachievement.
- The provision to develop students' economic and business understanding and financial capability is managed satisfactorily, but learning outcomes are not yet identified or assessed systematically.

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

- There is increasing provision in business education to meet the needs and interests of the full range of students.
- The school has introduced new courses and appropriate plans are in place to support further developments.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing students taking examination courses with sharper and more consistent feedback, indicating where they have or have not effectively demonstrated analytical and evaluative skills
- introducing a system to track and monitor students' economic and business understanding and financial capability, as they move through the school.

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

Vic Chivers  
Her Majesty's Inspector