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Mr J Elms
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Dear Mr Elms

Ofsted 2009 subject survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 17 and 18 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 development of economic and business understanding and financial capability for all students.

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 six 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 good.

- The attainment of students studying both GCE and BTEC business courses in the sixth form is above average. At Key Stage 4, the attainment of students studying the BTEC First Diploma in business is above average. The attainment of those studying the GCSE business course is below

average although the percentage gaining A* and A grades in 2009 is above average.

- As a result of good teaching, all students make good progress in relation to their starting points and this was evident in the lessons observed.
- Most students have good attitudes to learning and, where behaviour is potentially challenging, teachers work hard to ensure appropriate tasks engage students effectively and develop their independent learning skills.
- Students not taking business education courses are developing good enterprise and financial capability skills, although their understanding of general business and economic issues is less well developed.

Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching in business education is good.

- Teachers are skilled subject specialists.
- Lessons are planned well and delivery is well paced. Teaching activities are varied and matched well to students' abilities, ensuring that students remain engaged and interested.
- There is a good focus on real-world business contexts. Teachers are skilled at developing students' understanding by building on familiar contexts.
- The support for students, including that from teaching assistants, is very good. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well and there are good opportunities for gifted and talented students.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good. Students are very positive about the quality of teaching and assessment.
- Questioning is often fast paced and effective at establishing what students know. However, it does not always stretch students sufficiently by encouraging them to think hard and explore new ideas, and there is no expectation that all students are required to respond to questions.
- Assessment is accurate. There is good reference in lessons and in written feedback to relevant assessment criteria. Written feedback is detailed and indicates clearly how students might improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- A good range of business and economics courses caters well for the needs of students of all abilities and provides well-planned progression routes.
- At whole-school level, extensive provision is made to develop enterprise and financial capability skills and this is a strength of the school. There is, however, less emphasis on developing economic and business understanding.

- There are impressive links with local businesses. The well-attended regular Business Breakfast club is an example of good practice that benefits the local business community and enhances the school's own business education and wider provision.
- A good range of enrichment activities, including young enterprise activities, enhances the business education provision.
- The business studies department's involvement with the school's work as a business and enterprise specialist college has a positive impact on the wider curriculum. For example, leading on the development of teaching and learning, making valuable links with local businesses and leading the introduction of BTEC courses across the curriculum. Its work with local partnership schools is also strong. For example, it is assisting with the introduction of a business education course in a partner school and accepts students from other schools on its own business education courses.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in business education

The leadership and management of business education are good.

- Rigorous self-evaluation takes place. The head of department has an accurate view of priorities and is proactive in bringing about improvement.
- Effective monitoring systems are in place to support teachers and to monitor the progress of students against challenging targets
- School leaders are very supportive of the business and enterprise specialist college activities and are heavily involved in extensive partnership working with local schools and colleges and with the local business community.
- The provision for developing students' economic well-being in relation to enterprise and financial capability is coordinated well. The head of department plays a key role in helping to embed the specialism across the school.
- The new director of specialism is introducing a more structured approach to whole-school provision by identifying learning outcomes and establishing a means of assessing how well student are making progress in relation to these.

Areas for development, which we discussed include:

- ensuring that all students expect to contribute to question and answer sessions and that questioning is sufficiently probing to challenge all students to think hard about what they are learning
- developing work on identifying learning outcomes so that there is sufficient emphasis on economic and business understanding as well as enterprise and financial capability, and considering how to assess students' progress in meeting these outcomes.

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