

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

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



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Mr J Howells
Headteacher
Leasowes Community College
Kent Road
Halesowen
B62 8PJ

Dear Mr Howells

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 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 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 seven lessons, an enterprise activity and a meeting of the school council.

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.

- A higher proportion of students than the national average gain A* to C grades at GCSE in business. This represents good progress for these students relative to their prior attainment. Students do significantly better

in business than in their other courses in Key Stage 4 and have very positive attitudes to learning about business.

- In the lessons observed, students used information and communication technology (ICT) well to support their learning. Students demonstrated a good level of attainment and independent learning skills. Their behaviour was good and they were fully engaged in tasks and activities.
- Students enjoy their business lessons and value highly the support they receive from teachers. They enjoy using ICT to help them with their work and the relevance of their studies to the real world. They highlight the value of 'flexi-Fridays' and 'fast-track weeks', concentrated blocks of time that enable them to do in-depth and wide-ranging projects, including work with local businesses.
- Students not taking business examination courses develop good economic and business understanding and financial capability. They talk about what they have learned confidently and with considerable insight.

Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching in business education is good.

- Business teachers plan lessons well with a strong focus on what students will be learning from a wide range of relevant tasks and activities. Lesson activities build well on students' previous knowledge and areas for development. Teachers are mostly successful in their planning to provide sufficient stretch and challenge for the higher-attaining students and to support all students in their learning; however, planning was not of a consistently high standard in all of the lessons observed and planned extension tasks did not always provide additional challenge.
- In the lessons observed, teachers made frequent checks on students' learning and the progress they were making. For example, well-planned tasks enabled careful assessment of students' understanding of key ideas and provided good opportunities for students to apply their learning. Teachers often made good use of questioning to both check and extend students' learning. However, on other occasions, teachers' questioning did not provide a sufficient check on all students' understanding and opportunities to extend their learning were missed.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. In the lessons observed, teachers paid good attention to encouraging students to use appropriate terminology and often used real-life examples well to support learning.
- Teachers' marking of students' work is detailed, thorough and constructive. Students value the highly constructive feedback on their work and progress. They know what they need to do to improve their performance to meet appropriately challenging targets.

Quality of the curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is outstanding.

- The introduction of a vocational business programme into the curriculum has helped to ensure that qualifications in business meet students' learning styles and prior attainment extremely well. Business is a very popular choice. Students completing GCSE in Year 10 have the opportunity to study business at GCE AS level in Year 11 and, as a result of arrangements with local sixth-form providers, may progress directly to A-level study when they move into the sixth form.
- An exceptional range of opportunities is in place for students to develop enterprise and work-related skills, with formal accreditation through qualifications from Year 9 onwards. These arrangements are particularly valuable for those students not taking business examination courses.
- There are very good opportunities to engage with local businesses and employers, including well-managed enterprise activities and work experience. Students' reflections from their work experience are used well to inform their work in Year 11.
- Provision for economic and business understanding, personal financial capability and enterprise is outstanding. The school has a very good overview of the provision and where this is taught. Well-conceived arrangements are in place to assess the identified learning outcomes.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in business education

The effectiveness of leadership and management in business education is good.

- There is a clear vision for business education. The wider provision for economic and business understanding and financial capability is integrated with business examination courses into a coherent programme.
- Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of how this provision may be further improved and are clearly focused on further raising the levels of students' progress and attainment. There is a strong culture of continuous improvement. Teachers are supported well, and have good professional development opportunities.
- There are good arrangements to enable local primary school pupils to experience enterprise education, which ensures a smooth transition to related activities when they join Leasowes Community College.

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

The school already has a very comprehensive curriculum in place to meet the needs and interests of its students, and has established opportunities for students to gain relevant accreditation in business-related study from Year 9. The school has taken the lead in the successful consortium bid for the development of the new business, administration and finance diploma and has good links with post-16 providers in the area.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that teachers' use of questioning to check and extend learning is of a consistently high standard in lessons
- improving the consistency of lesson planning so that tasks and activities meet the needs of all students and extension tasks provide the higher-attaining students with sufficient stretch and challenge.

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

Russell Jordan
Her Majesty's Inspector