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Mr P Poulton
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Dear Mr Poulton

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 8 and 9 December 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and the observation of four 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.

- The proportion of students gaining A* to C grades at GCSE in business has improved very significantly on the results of the previous year but remains below the national average. This represents adequate progress relative to the prior attainment of these students. Currently, the large majority of students in Year 11 is in line to achieve their target grades. In the lessons

observed, students demonstrated good levels of attainment and independent learning skills.

- Students not taking business examination courses develop good economic and business understanding and financial capability. They highlight the value of the work in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) in enabling them to learn about the choices and constraints of the real world and about managing their finances. They enjoy working in groups and sharing their ideas. They show good levels of reflection on what they have learned.

Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching in business education is good.

- Teachers plan lessons well. A wide range of relevant tasks and activities is successful in engaging students' interest and involvement. Lesson activities build well on students' previous knowledge, but teachers are not always successful in providing sufficient stretch and challenge for the higher-attaining students.
- In the lessons observed, well-planned tasks enabled appropriate 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 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.
- 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.
- The marking of students' work is both detailed and thorough. Students receive highly constructive feedback on their performance and know what they need to do to improve the quality of their work. They highlight the value of being able to agree their personal targets with their teachers.

Quality of the curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- The introduction of the Business, Administration and Finance Diploma in Key Stage 4 alongside the GCSE in business meets the full range of students' needs and expectations. The proportion of students choosing a business course in Key Stage 4 is in line with the national average.
- The school makes good provision for economic and business understanding and personal financial capability through the PSHEE programme, and through subjects such as geography.
- As the school recognises, opportunities for students to engage with local businesses and in enterprise activities are currently underdeveloped.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in business education

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

- The leadership and management of business studies examination courses are good. The school has a clear view of the strengths and areas for development. Appropriate strategies are in place to bring about improvements and these are showing clear evidence of impact.
- Strategies to monitor students' progress on business courses and to intervene where there is underachievement are well conceived and are bringing about improvement.
- Leaders and managers have an extremely clear vision for the wider economic and business provision for all students and have a clear understanding of how this provision may be further improved. Coordination of the work being done across subjects to develop basic economic and business concepts is strong.

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

The school's participation in a local consortium to develop the new Business, Administration and Finance Diploma has successfully widened the choice of courses in business at Key Stage 4. The school has good links with post-16 providers in the area.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement in business courses
- developing links with a wider range of local businesses and increasing opportunities for students to engage in enterprise activities
- ensuring that teachers' use of questioning to check and extend learning is of a consistently high standard in lessons.

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