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Mr A Schular
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Schular

Ofsted survey inspection programme – business education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 6 and 7 October 2009 to look at work in business education.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject (which includes examination courses in economics), 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 parts of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education, including the development of students' economic and business understanding and financial capability was judged to be good.

Achievement in business education

In the examination subjects provided in business education, students' achievement is outstanding. However, when combined with the development of economic and business understanding and financial capability for all students, overall achievement was judged to be good.

■ Standards in business education examination courses are very high.

- Students' progress in business education examination courses is excellent, especially for those students beginning the course with low levels of prior attainment.
- Students really enjoy their lessons. They work hard and behave exceptionally well. Retention rates between Years 12 and 13 are very high.
- In Year 10, all students follow a short business enterprise course. As a result, most gain the 'Skills Towards Enabling Progression' certificate equivalent to half a GCSE. Groups of students have been very successful in enterprise related activity. For example a team from last year's Year 13 became national champions of the 'Formula One Technology Challenge'. They went on to win the international prize for marketing and business planning.
- Currently it is not possible to measure achievement in students' knowledge, understanding and skills in economic and business understanding because the school does not yet identify the learning objectives and assess students' progress in this area.

Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching and learning in business education is good.

- Much of the teaching of examination classes is outstanding. Lessons build learning in a step by step way leading to the application of the learning in a practice examination question. Students then learn how to score the highest grades through self or peer assessment with excellent teacher guidance.
- Well-qualified teachers have very secure knowledge and understanding of business subjects and economics. As a result, teachers' explanations are very clear.
- Students value the variety of approaches to teaching and learning.
- Students feel very well supported and are made aware of how to improve their work through helpful written comments and oral feedback. They particularly welcome the level of one-to-one support and coaching both in and out of lessons.
- The quality of learning in non-examination lessons is variable. There is often an over-reliance on a limited range of approaches to teaching and learning.

Quality of curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is satisfactory.

- There is good provision for students for whom A level is the most appropriate course. GCE A levels in both business studies and economics

are very popular and successful. In Key Stage 4 at GCSE, both business studies and economics are popular choices. Due to staffing difficulties there are no applied courses running this year. However, plans exist to offer a BTEC alternative course in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form which will cater for the interests and needs of a wider range of learners.

- Teachers enliven examination courses with resources and examples related to the real world. In Year 10 GCSE lessons, work experience is used well to enhance learning. Within examination courses, direct contact with employers and real businesses is an area for development.
- There are satisfactory opportunities in the curriculum for students not following examination courses in business or economics to develop their economic and business understanding. For example, in Year 10, three mornings have been devoted to an enterprise project where students develop team work. Several departments have identified enterprising activity in what they do.
- There is some planning for the delivery of economic understanding and financial capability in the programme for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) but the effectiveness of this provision is too variable. Opportunities to discuss the current economic situation and its possible impact on the students are rare. In the sixth form, A level general studies is very successful and addresses areas of economic and business understanding. Students' economic well-being is further enhanced through visiting speakers.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in business education

The leadership and management of business education are satisfactory.

- The business education department is led very well by established leadership which has maintained excellent outcomes for students over a sustained period. Recently appointed staff are being supported well.
- Resources, in the department, are highly organised and teaching is led very well.
- The wider provision of economic well-being and financial capability lacks coherence. There is some good practice such as the Year 10 skills certificate and some highly successful extra-curricular activities. However, the national programmes of study for PSHE have had little impact on economic well-being education and there is insufficient monitoring of the quality of delivery of planned lessons.

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

The school has been increasingly successful in the traditional curriculum that it offers. New leadership recognises the need to broaden the

curriculum to better meet the needs of all groups of students. Plans exist to re-introduce vocational courses in business next year.

Areas for improvement in business education, which we discussed, included:

- improving the quality assurance of lessons aimed at developing students' economic and business understanding across the school
- identifying the learning outcomes students are expected to gain in business and enterprise education across the school and developing better systems to monitor and evaluate their progress
- providing more opportunities for students in examination classes to engage directly with local businesses.

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

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector