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Mr J Wright  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Wright

Ofsted survey inspection programme – business education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 and 13 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 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 made included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

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

Achievement in business education

Achievement in business education is outstanding.

- Attainment in the new BTEC First Diploma in Business is above average.
- The progress made by all students following business education courses at Key Stage 4 is at least good and for many it is excellent. There is no underachievement among individual groups.

- Students not following examination courses in business education have a very good grasp of business ideas and an excellent understanding of personal finance which they can relate to their adult lives. While their understanding of wider economic issues is sound, it is less well developed.
- Students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are excellent. They are developing very good independent learning skills and understand the relevance of their business knowledge and understanding to their future adult lives.

### Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching in business education is good.

- Teaching is often outstanding in relation to whole school provision for business and financial understanding and the development of skills that will equip all students for their future adult lives, but it is good in relation to formally assessed business education courses.
- Strengths of teaching in business examination courses include: well structured lessons; the variety of teaching and learning activities and resources, which engage students' interests and are firmly grounded in real world contexts and students' own experiences; the relationship between the teacher and students, which means that students really enjoy their business education lessons; and the opportunities for developing students' independent learning skills.
- In relation to formally assessed business education courses, questioning is not always sufficiently challenging; not all students expect to contribute and plenaries are sometimes rushed so there is little time to check students' knowledge and understanding.
- Business education students have very good access to computing facilities and information and communication technology in general enhances their learning experience. The development of the virtual learning software is particularly helpful in enabling students to have access to resources and in providing them with opportunities to gain additional support with coursework, for example during the holidays, when they are working independently at home.
- Students do so well because they get very good support and feedback on their coursework. Coursework assignment briefs are designed very well and structured. Formative feedback opportunities are regular and there is clear reference to assessment objectives and what needs to be done to improve the work further. Marking is accurate and this is confirmed by the external verifier.

### Quality of the curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is outstanding.

- Current provision for business education students meets their individual needs very well and as a result they make at least good, and often, excellent progress.
- All students do some form of vocational education and are provided with excellent opportunities to develop their business and financial understanding and their enterprise and work related skills. Provision to explore wider economic issues is not as well developed.
- Very good links exist with local employers at whole school level, for example, in relation to work-related learning, enterprise activities, the on-site Diploma studios and other creative and media projects. Real-world contexts are used consistently in business education lessons and outcomes from students' work experiences are used as a basis for coursework in certain modules.
- A wide range of enrichment activities are in place for the school as a whole. Many of these support students' development of business and financial awareness. However, in this small school, few are specifically aimed at business education students.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in business education

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

- Exceptionally strong leadership and management present at whole-school level and robust systems at departmental level are leading to at least good teaching, outstanding curriculum provision and exceptional outcomes for students. Senior leadership in the school is creative and innovative in its approach to provision. As a result, there is a persuasive vision across the school based on developing skills and attributes that will prepare students for their future adult and working lives. This includes a particularly strong focus on business and financial awareness.
- Self-evaluation is strong and accurately identifies priorities for improvement based on a clear evaluation of performance.
- Rigorous and regular monitoring of students' performance takes place and, where underachievement is identified, appropriate and timely interventions are introduced.
- Rigorous monitoring procedures are in place to support the quality of teaching and teachers get highly effective professional development and training. For example, the business education teacher has received very good support in relation to the change over to BTEC both within school and, more specifically, from the awarding board. However, with only one teacher of business education in the school, there is less opportunity to share best practice, both in relation to generic issues and in relation to the teaching of business education.

## Inclusion in business education

Inclusion in business education is outstanding.

- Students from all backgrounds and abilities have access to the business education courses and all have excellent opportunities to develop their business and financial understanding and skills. All students are supported very well and as a result they make at least good and often outstanding progress. There is no evidence of underachievement among individual groups.

Areas for development, which we discussed included:

- raising the profile of economic and business understanding so that economic aspects in particular are made more explicit across the whole school curriculum
- developing the quality of teaching in business education so that it matches the best in the school and encourages the sharing of good practice both generally and in particular with teachers in business education departments in other schools.

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