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Mr M Hulme
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hulme

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 18 and 19 March 2010 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education, including the development of students' economic and business understanding and financial capability, is outstanding.

Achievement in business education

Achievement in business education is good.

- Attainment is above average and most students make good progress in relation to their prior attainment and the challenging targets they are set. This was reflected in the lessons observed and in the written work reviewed during the visit.

- Students have very good attitudes to learning and behaviour is at least good in all lessons. Students are developing very good independent learning skills. They are confident about contributing in class and many ask searching questions that really challenge their teachers.
- Students not taking business examination courses develop good economic and business understanding and financial capability and many develop excellent enterprise skills.

Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching in business education is good.

- Teaching, which is consistently good and sometimes outstanding, contributes significantly to the good progress students make.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use this to design learning activities that interest and engage students of all abilities.
- Questioning is generally good because it is inclusive and open and checks students' understanding. However, it does not always challenge students to think about issues deeply enough. Opportunities are missed to engage them in discussions that develop the higher level skills of analysis and evaluation.
- Teachers make excellent use of real-world examples to support teaching and learning. Where these include contexts that students are familiar with or have experience of, they stimulate students' interest and promote their learning.
- Teaching resources, in the form of worksheets, case studies and classroom exercises, are very good and the use of information and communication technology as a tool to enhance teaching is effective. However, the school is aware that not all classrooms are ideal areas for learning.
- Students are supported exceptionally well and all students acknowledge the personalised help they are given by staff in the business studies faculty as a real strength.
- Written feedback on coursework and assignments is excellent and sharply focused on what students need to do to access the marks available for demonstrating the higher level skills of analysis and evaluation.
- Students are highly motivated and show a real interest in their studies. They appreciate fully how well their courses are helping them to develop their understanding and awareness of the economics and business environment they live in.

Quality of the curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is outstanding.

- The range of courses offered by the business studies faculty meets students' preferred learning styles and their abilities exceptionally well and ensures that clear progression routes are available for all.

- Students have excellent opportunities to engage with a wide range of businesses and employers. These links help students to understand business and economics contexts more effectively and have a positive impact on their achievement. They support coursework, provide a real-world context for case studies and generally support students' study of business and economics. In addition, BTEC First Diploma students gain relevant work experience and BTEC National students are involved in the Young Enterprise programme; both activities contributing to their assessed work.
- There are very good opportunities for all students to develop their enterprise and financial capabilities and their economic and business understanding through a coherent and broadly based programme that is tailored for each year group. The school is particularly strong in its provision to promote students' enterprise skills right across the curriculum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in business education

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

- There is a clear vision for business education that is based on improving student outcomes and raising the quality of provision. The vision, at whole-school level, for enterprise and financial capability and economic and business understanding involves ensuring that students are fully prepared for the world of work and raising their aspirations.
- The head of faculty has developed a highly cohesive team of subject experts and empowers them to constantly raise their game and seek further improvement. The faculty has a good track record of raising students' achievement. Effective planning and well-planned schemes of work are a strong feature.
- Self-evaluation is strong and includes individual teachers' reflection on their own strengths and weaknesses. It includes very good analysis of attainment and progress data. However, self-evaluation does not yet include the systematic capture of students' views about provision.
- Students' progress towards challenging targets is monitored rigorously and highly effect interventions are put in place when underachievement is identified.
- Annual subject reviews monitor the quality of teaching within the faculty. Effective professional development in the form of team-teaching, peer-coaching, peer-observation and visits to other schools takes place.
- Coordination of the whole-school provision for enterprise and financial capability and economic and business understanding is highly effective in ensuring a wide-ranging and high-quality provision. The input by a business education specialist ensures a good focus on financial capability and economic and business understanding. However, the school is only just considering how to assess students' progress in relation to this area of the curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing an appropriate means of assessing students' financial capability and economic and business understanding so that the school can be sure about the impact of its excellent provision in this area
- improving the quality of teacher questioning so that it becomes more than a means of checking understanding and that it consistently challenges all students to think deeply and to develop higher-level skills
- sharpening departmental self-evaluation by including the systematic use of students' views on provision.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business education in the school.

As I explained previously, 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