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Ms J Tinsley
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Dear Ms Tinsley

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 2 and 3 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 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 observation of five lessons and one tutor period.

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

Achievement in business education

Achievement in business education is satisfactory.

- Previously, attainment in traditional GCSE and GCE courses in business education has been below average. To meet the learning needs of students more effectively and to improve their achievement, the curriculum is changing and BTEC Business courses, which include a greater focus on coursework, are now being offered. School-based data

indicate that current attainment in these BTEC courses at both Key Stage 4 and post-16 is at least average.

- Students' progress and the quality of their learning are at least satisfactory and sometimes good. This is reflected in students' generally good attitudes to learning, their ability to work independently and their enthusiasm and motivation.
- At whole-school level, students are developing good enterprise and financial capabilities. Although their economic and business understanding is not as strong, they are developing good employment-related skills.

Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching in business education is satisfactory.

- Very good relationships exist between teachers and students, so that students feel confident in asking for support.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They use this to design well-planned lessons that include a range of interesting and relevant learning activities that make use of students' existing knowledge and understanding.
- Learning activities are not always matched well to the differing abilities of students in a class and thus do not always challenge the most able. Lessons do not move at a good pace. This and the lack of differentiation and challenge mean students do not always make good progress in their learning.
- Questioning does not always challenge students sufficiently to think hard about issues nor is there an expectation that all students will respond to questions.
- Teaching rooms have good information and communication technology facilities and these are used well to enhance the learning opportunities.
- Students know their targets and how to improve. This is facilitated by good support and guidance, accurate formative assessment and the very good written feedback they receive on their work, which is detailed and critical as well as constructive and encouraging.

Quality of the curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- The curriculum has undergone a process of continual change to meet students' needs more effectively and to maximise their achievement. This reflects a whole-school focus on making learning more applied and thus developing students' work-related skills.
- Appropriate pathways to progress are available in Year 12 so that students can access level 2 and level 3 courses in business education.

- Provision to develop enterprise and financial capability is excellent and wide ranging, although provision for economic and business understanding is not as strong. Provision for enterprise and financial capability is embedded very well within the curriculum at all key stages. For example, it is reflected in the personal, social, health and economic education provision, across the curriculum in the BTEC and diploma courses, in form periods, in enrichment activities in the sixth form and in the school's specialist visual arts provision.
- Engagement with business and employers is good, particularly in relation to whole-school enterprise provision. This contributes very well to the development of students' enterprise and work-related skills. However, well-developed business links are less evident in business education examined courses.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in business education

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

- The business education department has suffered from recent staffing problems in relation to its leadership and management, which has affected achievement in the subjects. These problems have now been resolved and a positive impact is being felt, particularly in relation to curriculum developments.
- Self-evaluation at departmental level does not clearly identify the strengths of provision and the areas for further development.
- Monitoring of students' progress is rigorous. Effective monitoring procedures are in place and teachers identify underachievement promptly and provide appropriate support for individual students.
- There is strong support from the school's senior leadership team for enterprise provision and this is coordinated well at whole-school level. At present, learning outcomes are not formally identified nor is students' progress towards them assessed. However, the very enthusiastic and highly committed staff are aware of these areas for development and are planning to tackle them.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- speeding up the rate of progress students make in their business education lessons by ensuring that learning activities are appropriately challenging and match the needs of students of differing abilities
- improving the quality of questioning so that all students are required to think hard about issues and that there is an expectation that all students are required to reflect and to respond
- strengthening the provision at whole-school level to develop students' economic and business understanding so that it is as good as that for enterprise and financial capability

- in relation to enterprise and financial capability and economic and business understanding, identifying learning outcomes and considering how to assess students' progress in meeting these.

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