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Mr Breen
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Dear Mr Breen

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business Education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18-19 September 2006 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 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 without their consent. 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 was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

In A level business studies students' achievement is good.

- Examination results are around the national average. Given the GCSE scores of students when they begin the course, this represents good achievement. Students generally reach their expected grades, with many exceeding them.
- Students show good attitudes to learning and were well motivated in the lessons observed.

Quality of teaching and learning of business education

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

- Students benefit from teachers' expert knowledge and their use of relevant and interesting examples drawn from their own business experience.
- Teachers deploy a range of teaching and learning styles, including teacher led discussion, group work and presentations. Computers are used for web-based research and for student and group presentations.
- Students feel well supported and are made aware of how to improve their work through helpful written comments and oral feedback.
- Although students attend revision conferences, there are currently very limited opportunities for them to engage directly with businesses.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in business education is satisfactory.

- The A level business studies course is popular but the current level two provision in the sixth form does not meet the needs of all learners. No examination courses are offered in the main school. The school is seeking to broaden its offer of vocationally relevant courses in both the main school and the sixth form.
- There are some strengths in the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4. All pupils take a short course in GCSE citizenship and learning in citizenship is assessed annually. There is now good provision of the aspects of economic and business understanding covered within the citizenship course, but it is too soon to see the full impact of this on pupils' learning.
- The provision for enterprise and personal finance education has improved greatly since the last inspection.

Leadership and management of business education

The leadership and management of business education are good.

- In A level business studies, courses are well structured and the strengths of the well qualified staff complement each other. Resources are good. The need to connect the subject with the real world of business is recognised.
- In the main school the management of the wider development of business education has been strengthened considerably. Recent appointments have led to increased provision but monitoring the impact of this on students' learning is still underdeveloped.

Subject issue Personal Finance Education

Provision is satisfactory.

- The citizenship programme ensures that pupils are made aware of the problems of debt and the costs of different forms of borrowing. Students are taught about the connection between taxation and public spending. However, there is not yet a coherent programme which covers all aspects of personal financial education.

Inclusion

- The citizenship course ensures that all pupils have access to some elements of economic and business understanding with clear learning outcomes which are assessed.
- The learning experiences of students in the main school have not been audited to ensure that they all get their full entitlement to the broad range of economic, business and financial education.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- connecting A level business studies more directly to the real world of business
- the introduction of level two courses that better meet student needs both in the sixth form and in the main school

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/Local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector