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02 March 2009

Mr Traynor
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Dear Mr Traynor

Ofsted survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for the hospitality and co-operation provided by you, your staff and your students, during my visit on 9 - 10 February 2009 to look at work in business education.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at examination courses in business education, the visit also considered the development of economic and business understanding and financial capability for all students at Key Stage 4 and the introduction of the new programme of study for economic well-being and financial capability at Key Stage 3.

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 made included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of thirteen lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory

- Attainment in GCSE examinations is above the national average and has improved in each of the last three years. However, achievement is only satisfactory because a significant proportion of middle ability students achieve below expectations.

- Attainment at A-level is below the national average for business studies but above that for economics. Given their starting points, achievement of sixth form students is good.
- Evidence from lesson observations suggest that, overall, students are making good progress as a result of the good teaching they receive.
- Attitudes to learning are good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. Students enjoy their business education courses, behave well in class, are keen to contribute to discussions and work well independently. Attendance is excellent.
- Students who are not taking examination courses in business are developing a satisfactory understanding of economics, business and personal finance.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was at least good and sometimes outstanding.
- All business education teachers are specialists and their excellent subject knowledge is demonstrated through their confidence in the classroom.
- Lessons are well structured and proceed at a good pace.
- Classrooms are welcoming and include excellent displays of relevant materials.
- Information and communication technology and other teaching resources are used very well to enhance learning and are appropriately matched to students' needs and abilities.
- Students are encouraged to share ideas through very effective group work and discussions, which are a regular feature of all lessons.
- The very effective use of specialist computer programmes encourages all students to contribute to question and answer sessions in lessons. However, questioning is not always sufficiently challenging, for example in requiring students to fully explain key concepts or providing in depth analysis and evaluation.
- There are very good relations between students and teachers and students appreciate the very good support they receive from teachers both in and outside of lessons.
- Direct engagement with employers is not a regular feature of provision for all business education students. However, good use is made of video clips and case studies and teachers consistently draw on real world contexts.
- Marking is regular, assessment is accurate and written comments provide students with good advice on how to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory

- All students have access to business education courses. The good take-up in Year 10 is an indication of the popularity of the subject.
- Provision in the sixth form is good and ensures that suitable courses are available for the full range of students.
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. Plans are in place to broaden provision to ensure the full range of students' needs is met more effectively from September 2009.
- There are limited extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities for business education students.
- A range of appropriate activities supports the development of students' economic, business and financial understanding. However, the provision currently lacks coherence across Key Stages 3 and 4 and changes are being planned for September 2009.

Quality of leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management are good

- The appointment of a new head of department in September 2008 has had a significant and positive impact on the quality of provision in business education.
- The excellent self-evaluation is reflected in the department's highly effective action planning, which is leading to improved outcomes for students.
- The monitoring of teaching is very effective and has resulted in more teaching being consistently good or better.
- The subject specific professional development needs of teachers are clearly identified and opportunities are provided to meet these.
- E-learning is used well and the department's expertise in this area is being used to provide a lead across the school.
- The department is very well run. Teachers are committed and support each other well. Clear objectives and priorities for development are agreed and pursued by all and this indicates very good capacity to bring about further improvement.
- At whole school level, the learning outcomes for economic well-being and financial capability have not yet been identified and there is no means of assessing them.

Areas for development we discussed:

- improve the achievement of middle ability students at Key Stage 4
- improve the quality of questioning so that students develop their ability to articulate key concepts and to analyse and evaluate more effectively

- extend the range of enrichment opportunities and links with employers for students in business education
- identify and assess the learning outcomes for economic well-being and financial capability and improve the coherence of the provision at Key Stages 3 and 4.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop the provision for business education in your 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector