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25 February 2009

Ms J Downes
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Downes

Ofsted survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 11-12 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, a scrutiny of relevant documentation and students' work and observation of four lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good overall and outstanding in GCSE and GCE AS and A2 courses.

- In 2008 GCSE business studies examination results were a significant improvement on the previous year. Both the A*-C pass rate and the proportion of students achieving A* and A grades are well above

national averages. These results represent excellent achievement in relation to students' prior attainment.

- Students' attainment on GCE AS and A2 courses is outstanding with high pass and completion rates and a high proportion of top grades. These results represent excellent progress in relation to students' starting points. The standard of coursework is very high.
- Students generally made very good progress in the lessons observed and this was reflected in the sample of work scrutinised. Students were engaged in a range of activities and worked productively on developing their ideas, particularly those related to improving their examination techniques and using case study material effectively. A minority of students were not given sufficient opportunities in discussions to develop their responses to a higher level or demonstrate what they already knew.
- In Key Stage 3, students' enterprise skills are developed through work in design technology, information and communications technology and other cross-curricular areas. The school is aware of some gaps in this provision. Students in Key Stage 4 are making good progress in developing their economic and business understanding, financial capability and enterprise skills through the citizenship programme, voluntary work, a 'ready for work' day and tutor group activities. The students interviewed were confident young people who could demonstrate how the school has supported them in preparing for their futures.
- Students have good attitudes to learning, most are well organised and are positive about their business courses. Students' behaviour in lessons and their conduct in meetings were exemplary.
- An analysis of results indicates that boys achieve better than girls in GCSE business studies. As a response to this, and following consultation with senior managers and students, the department is experimenting with delivering the course in Year 10 to single sex groups. The impact of this strategy is being closely monitored and the feedback from students has so far been positive.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers of business studies have good subject knowledge and are well supported through staff development in developing their teaching methods to meet the needs of the wide ability range of students in their groups.
- Teaching is well planned and focussed on how learning objectives will be met in each session. A range of activities, including good use of real world examples and current economic events, engages students and develops their understanding. Students are enthusiastic and respond well.
- Teachers regularly check learning using appropriate questioning techniques. However, on occasions too many of the questions are

directed at the whole group and opportunities to develop students' responses more fully are missed.

- Teaching in the lessons observed was lively and students participated well. Close attention was given to preparing students very well for external examinations.
- Teachers have a very good knowledge of their students and provide them with excellent support both within and outside of lessons.
- Students know how well they are performing in relation to their target grades. Marking and assessment of students' work are thorough and students receive helpful feedback on how they can improve.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Business studies is a popular option at Key Stage 4. Vocational courses are also offered but the take-up has tended to be low. In the sixth form, the GCE AS business course caters for students with a broad range of prior attainment and most are very successful.
- The school recognises the need to improve the provision to develop students' economic well-being and financial capability, particularly in Key Stage 3 and is taking steps to address this.
- There are additional opportunities for students to pursue their interests in business and enterprise through extra-curricular activities, such as Young Enterprise in the sixth form, the enterprise challenge in Year 10, charity work organised by the student council and the lunchtime enterprise club in Year 7.
- The school has a very strong link with an international business whose headquarters are located in the town and who is a large local employer.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- Business courses are very well managed by the head of department who is strongly supported by senior managers.
- The department carries out a rigorous analysis of its provision which takes account of examination results, lesson observations and the views of students.
- Students' progress is monitored closely and there are effective strategies in place to raise achievement.
- Schemes of work are thorough. Teachers share high quality resources and regularly discuss effective methods of delivering business studies topics.
- An audit has been undertaken to evaluate how well the school's provision matches the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's programmes of study for work-related learning and economic well-being/financial capability.

- The school has yet to develop a system to assess and monitor students' progress and attainment in enterprise, economic and business understanding and personal finance as they progress through the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that students are given sufficient opportunities in lessons to contribute their own ideas and to fully develop their answers during group discussions
- implementing plans to strengthen the provision to develop students' economic and business understanding and financial literacy
- developing a system to assess students' enterprise skills, financial capability and economic and business understanding as they progress through the school.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your provision for business and enterprise education.

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

Bev Barlow
Her Majesty's Inspector