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Mr S O'Hagan  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr O'Hagan

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16-17 November 2009 to look at work in business education.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject (including examination courses in economics) 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

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

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

Achievement in business education

In the examination subjects provided in business education, students' achievement is satisfactory.

- Attainment in GCSE business studies has improved rapidly over the last two years and is now well above average. In the sixth form, where smaller numbers of students take business studies, attainment at A level is broadly average.

- Students' progress in business education examination courses is now in line with expectations, given their starting points.
- Students generally enjoy their lessons, especially in the sixth form. They are often involved well in the learning process through making presentations or teaching topics to the class. Students are engaged most when the learning is clearly linked to the real world and builds on direct contact with business.
- Currently it is not possible to measure achievement in students' knowledge, understanding and skills in economic and business because, although the school has identified the learning objectives for this area, it is still investigating the best way to assess students' progress.

### Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching in business education is good.

- Each member of the business education department was observed delivering a good lesson. Discussion with students and direct observation suggest that the best teaching is found in the sixth form.
- Well-qualified teachers have very secure knowledge and understanding of business subjects and economics. As a result, teachers' explanations are very clear.
- Students value, and benefit from, the variety of approaches to teaching and learning and the well-prepared resources. This variety is not yet found consistently across all the teachers and all the courses.
- Students feel they are supported well and made aware of how to improve their work through helpful written comments and oral feedback. They point out that their teachers are 'very approachable'.
- In Years 10 and 11, specialist teachers of personal, health, social and economic (PHSE) education use a range of teaching strategies to make topics interesting and engaging for students. This has a positive impact on their attitude to business and economic topics, such as in the Year 10 mini-enterprise activity.

### Quality of curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- There is a very good range of specialist subject provision to meet the needs and interests of different groups of students. In Years 10 and 11, the GCSE in business studies is popular and a small group of students has embarked on the business and finance diploma (BAF). In the sixth form, two popular A levels are supplemented by BAF courses at both levels 2 and 3.
- Opportunities for students to engage with the real world of business are received enthusiastically. For example, the trip to a major chocolate manufacturer motivated students to produce coursework based upon it.

There are also occasional examples of visitors from business speaking on relevant topics. However, there is inconsistency across courses and opportunities to bring the subject alive are missed.

- There is appropriate planning for the delivery of economic understanding and financial capability in the programme for PHSE education. Activities such as the 'real game' provide a good introduction for students in Key Stage 3, while the use of specialist teachers in Key Stage 4 enhances the effectiveness of the provision.
- Opportunities to discuss the current economic situation and its possible impact on students are rare. In the sixth form, the AS-level general studies course focuses on some areas of economic and business understanding. Students' economic well-being is further enhanced through visiting speakers.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in business education

The leadership and management of business education are good.

- Standards have risen despite a period of staffing instability. Overseas-trained teachers have been inducted well into the school's culture and the country's teaching style. Teachers have been successfully guided through their acquisition of English qualified teacher status.
- The department's leadership has analysed the strengths and areas for further improvement well.
- The provision of economic well-being and financial capability education is planned well in accordance with the national programmes of study for PSHE education. Senior leaders have worked with the personal finance education group to develop materials in this area. Learning outcomes have been identified and some assessment activities are undertaken. However, students' progress is not yet monitored coherently or comprehensively assessed.

Subject issue: the impact of 14 to 19 developments in business education

The school is the lead partner for the BAF in a consortium of secondary schools covering the local district. It provides the full range of diplomas within the subject. The teaching approaches employed with the diploma groups offer examples of good practice which could usefully benefit more traditional courses in the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing more opportunities for students in examination classes to engage directly with local businesses
- engaging students more systematically by employing a wider range of teaching approaches on all courses

- building on current work in developing economic and business understanding by monitoring students' experiences and the progress they are making.

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 and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons  
Her Majesty's Inspector