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Mrs P Butterfield
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Butterfield

Ofsted survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 09-10 March 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 schools/colleges will not be identified in the main text.

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

The overall effectiveness of business education, including support to develop students' economic well being was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good

- Across the school, students develop good economic and business understanding and financial capability.
- Students develop good independent learning skills.
- Business studies students performed satisfactorily in the 2008 public examinations. However, achievement varies year-on-year and students made good progress in previous years. Success rates for post-16 students are mixed; students make slow progress in Year 12, but achieve well in Year 13.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in business-related lessons is good.

- The great majority of teaching is good and this is reflected in the progress made by students. Staff expectations of students are often high, but this is not the case in a minority of lessons.
- Students' attitudes to learning are good and behaviour in lessons is excellent.
- The business studies teacher has good subject knowledge and deploys an appropriate range of styles that effectively engage most students. Lessons are generally well planned, proceed at an adequate pace and include appropriate questioning which challenges students' thinking. Effective use is made of information technology, where appropriate.
- Appropriate emphasis is given in business studies to developing students' understanding of key terms and technical vocabulary. Student workbooks have a clear purpose and are well presented. However, not all students have a clear understanding of the skills needed to achieve higher level grades.
- Business studies students have limited opportunities to visit local businesses; where these are provided, they give students very positive and useful experiences.
- Across the curriculum, teaching is often linked to real world examples, but there is scope for building more on students' own experiences.
- Business studies students are able to express their ideas clearly in discussions. They are encouraged to work collaboratively in teams and make presentations; however, there is scope for expanding these opportunities in Years 10-12. Students receive useful feedback on their work and appropriate interventions are made where necessary. The tracking of students' progress is good.

Quality of the curriculum

The business education curriculum is good.

- Throughout the school, there are many good opportunities for students to develop their economic and business understanding and financial capability and plans are in place to extend these further during 2009. There is, however, scope for introducing some financial topics at an earlier stage. Geography, mathematics, food technology, French and citizenship make significant contributions to students' understanding of economic and global issues.
- There are very good opportunities for students to show leadership and take on responsibility and students respond well to these.
- Work experience undertaken in Year 10 helps students improve their understanding of the world of work. There is a strong focus on developing key skills during placements; follow-up and debriefings provide further opportunities for learning to be consolidated.
- Students are encouraged to be creative in raising funds for charities. A wide range of enterprise activities provide further opportunities for students to develop their team working and problem solving skills. The school also regularly participates in local 'challenge' events, often involving local businesses, and students perform well.

- The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme helps many students to develop their self-confidence and other enterprise skills.
- Community activities undertaken by sixth formers make a valuable contribution to their understanding of voluntary work and local organisations.

Leadership and management of business education

Leadership and management of business education are good.

- There is a clear vision for business education which promotes economic well being, including financial capability, across the school.
- In business studies, the record of success in raising standards over time is good. The quality of self-evaluation is sound and identifies realistic strategies for improvement. Staff development needs are identified and followed up appropriately.
- Co-ordination of the provision to develop students' economic and business understanding and financial capability across the school is well managed. The effectiveness of activities is carefully evaluated, including taking account of students' views.
- Opportunities to promote students' economic well being are clearly identified in subject schemes of work. An audit of provision across the curriculum has been completed at Key Stage 4. Learning outcomes are assessed, but this is done in a variety of ways and separately for different activities. Students record some skills achieved, for example, in their learning passports, progress files and Year 11 personal statements, but there is not a systematic collation of the full range of achievements.
- At Key Stage 4, where a student with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is deemed to lack important key skills and competences, appropriate intervention and support programmes are put in place to tackle these.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- in business studies, ensuring that students have a clear understanding of the skills needed to achieve the higher level grades in examinations
- drawing together the various ways of tracking and monitoring the progress students make towards economic and business understanding and financial capability as they move through the school.

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

Vic Chivers
Her Majesty's Inspector