

22 September 2008

Ms S Marooney
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Dear Ms Marooney

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 16-17 September 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 eight lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Examination results in 2008 were above average in GCSE business and communications systems and in line with them for business studies. These results represent good achievement in relation to students' prior attainment.
- Students generally made good progress in the lessons observed and this was reflected in the sample of work scrutinised. A minority of students made slower progress in lessons than they should have done either because they were insufficiently engaged or because there was too little emphasis given to developing their understanding of key concepts.

- Students in Years 8 and 9 are making good progress in developing enterprise skills and gaining a basic understanding of business through the core lessons and across the curriculum.
- Students have good attitudes to learning and are positive about their business courses. Students' behaviour in lessons and their conduct in meetings were excellent.
- There is no evidence of any particular group of students underachieving in business, although the proportion of students attaining A* or A grades in business and communications systems was below national figures in 2008. Students who have English as an additional language achieve well.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers of business and communications systems and business studies have good subject knowledge.
- Teaching is thorough. The learning outcomes students are expected to achieve are clear. Lessons are well structured, include a range of activities and generally proceed at an appropriate pace. Classroom relationships are good and students generally respond well to the tasks set. Good use is made of the excellent facilities for information and communication technology to support learning.
- Teaching in the lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to good. Lessons were satisfactory, rather than good, either because they were not fully successful in actively engaging all students in learning or because they gave too little attention to developing students' understanding of basic economics and business concepts.
- Students feel well supported in their learning and this plays a key part in their success in GCSE courses. Their progress is carefully monitored and additional support is provided for students in danger of underachieving or who are keen to exceed their target grades.
- The marking and assessment of students' work is thorough and students receive helpful feedback on how they can improve. A potentially useful system of assessing students' enterprise skills has been recently introduced.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The business and enterprise education curriculum has some major strengths, reflecting the school's specialist status. There is a well structured course in business and enterprise education for all students in Years 8 and 9. This gives students a good introduction to basic business ideas and helps promote their enterprise skills. It has been instrumental in significantly raising the numbers of students opting for GCSE business studies in Year 10. All students in Years 10 and 11 take the GCSE business and communications systems course and all students have the option of taking GCSE business studies.

- Enterprise education is becoming increasingly embedded across the curriculum and the enterprise days are very well received by students. There are additional opportunities for students to pursue their interests in business and enterprise through extra-curricular activities, such as Young Enterprise and the 'Money Club'.
- The school is developing a number of effective links with local businesses, although students currently taking business examination courses have so far had few direct contacts with employers.
- The school is very well placed to introduce the new programme of study for economic well-being and financial capability. Provision to develop students' enterprise skills is very good but the school is aware of the need to increase the provision for personal finance education and economic and business understanding.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- Business courses are well managed by the subject leader who is very well supported by senior managers. Schemes of work are thorough and helpful support material is provided for teachers. There is effective monitoring of student progress.
- Effective action has been taken to raise examination results in GCSE business and communications by focussing on improving students' coursework.
- A detailed analysis of students' performance in examinations is undertaken but other aspects of self-evaluation, including how teaching might be improved and making use of students' views, are less well developed.
- Useful audits have been undertaken to evaluate how well the school's current provision matches the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's programmes of study for work-related learning and economic well-being and financial capability.
- Although systems are in place to assess students' enterprise skills, there is not yet an overview of 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 all lessons fully engage learners in activities that develop their knowledge and understanding of economics and business, as well as their enterprise skills
- strengthening the provision to develop students' economic and business understanding and financial literacy
- further developing the systems to assess students' enterprise skills, financial literacy 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 and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

David Butler
Her Majesty's Inspector