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Mr Brian Rourke
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Dear Mr Rourke

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: economics, business and enterprise

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 29 February and 1 March 2012 to look at work in economics, business and enterprise.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of seven lessons and observation of enterprise activities.

The overall effectiveness of economics, business and enterprise is outstanding.

Achievement in economics, business and enterprise

Achievement in economics, business and enterprise is outstanding.

- Attainment is high in business studies, both at GCSE in Year 11 and on the Level 3 BTEC business course offered in the sixth form. Students make excellent progress given their starting points. All groups of students work with a good deal of independence. They are adept at using information and communication technology (ICT) to seek out up-to-date information to develop their assignments and substantiate their arguments. They apply theory very effectively to the analysis and evaluation of real-life business cases, so that a high proportion of students achieve the highest grades in GCSE and BTEC courses.

- Across the school, students develop excellent employability skills. By Year 9 they have a particularly well-developed understanding of career pathways. Students work very effectively in teams where they apply the range of enterprise skills needed in successful organisations. These skills were praised highly, for example, by visiting business representatives leading an enterprise activity in Year 9.
- Students speak with confidence about economic events and conditions. They have a good general understanding of aspects of personal financial management and household budgeting.

Quality of teaching in economics, business and enterprise

The quality of teaching in economics, business and enterprise is outstanding.

- Lessons in formally assessed business courses, and those featuring aspects of enterprise and economic understanding across the school, are characterised by the high expectations teachers have for students' conduct and progress. Students work with pace, purpose and independence on a range of challenging activities.
- A strong focus in all lessons and activities is on the development of students' higher-level skills of analysis and evaluation. Teachers' well-targeted questioning of students develops these skills by getting students to argue a case or justify their responses.
- Teachers' planning is exceptionally detailed. It incorporates a clear understanding of the needs of individual students. This enables tasks or grouping arrangements to be adapted to stretch the higher attainers and give more structured guidance to those who find learning more difficult.
- In the formally assessed business courses, the quality of assessment and the feedback given to students on their attainment and progress is exceptionally high. Students' progress is reviewed regularly to keep them on track. Students value the excellent support and guidance they are given, within and outside lessons, to ensure their success.

Quality of the curriculum in economics, business and enterprise

The quality of the curriculum in economics, business and enterprise is outstanding.

- Formally assessed courses in business are popular in the school. Lessons, assignments and activities are very well designed to make interesting links to real-life business situations. ICT is readily available to students and teachers, providing excellent resources for learning.
- The school curriculum accords a high priority to the preparation of students for the world of work and later life. The personal, social, health, economic, and citizenship programmes offer many opportunities for students to develop their economic and financial understanding. A number of the regular off-timetable 'Rainbow Days' are devoted to whole-day activities aimed at developing students' understanding of business, finance

and the operation of government. Enterprise skills are explicitly promoted in many lessons across the curriculum

- Excellent links are in place with employers to support work-related learning and work experience programmes that are much valued by students. The school works very closely with the Sefton Education Business Partnership to manage the work-related programmes and to lead innovative enterprise projects for all year groups. Well-planned links with businesses support students learning in the sixth form business course, but few such links are in the GCSE course.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in economics, business and enterprise

The effectiveness of leadership and management in economics, business and enterprise is outstanding.

- Senior leaders offer strong support for the development of a rich programme of business, enterprise and work-related learning opportunities across the school. These programmes are very effectively managed by a strong group of middle leaders. The success of aspects of each element of the provision is regularly evaluated through assessments and surveys. However, at present no methods are in place for tracking the development of each student's economic understanding and financial and enterprise capabilities.
- Leadership and management of the formally assessed courses are excellent. Self-evaluation is rigorous, leading to refinements in teaching and the curriculum which have yielded sustained improvement over time. Support for the development of teaching, including that of newly qualified teachers in the department, is highly effective.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing further links with businesses to support students' learning in the GCSE business course in Years 10 and 11
- implementing a system for tracking and monitoring the development of each student's economic understanding and financial and enterprise capabilities.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop economics, business and enterprise in the school. As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector