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Dear Mr Hobson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – English and business education

On behalf of Jackie Krafft and myself, I would like to thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during our visit on 13-14 June to look at work in English and 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 without their consent. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons in English and one lesson in business education.

English

The overall effectiveness of English was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards in English are below average. Achievement is satisfactory.

- Students enter the college with standards that are below average in English. The number of higher ability students choosing to join the school in Year 7 is increasing.

- Standards are below average at the end of Key Stage 3, particularly in reading, with some students not being awarded a level for this in the end of key stage national tests.
- The rate of progress students make is improving in Key Stage 3 and is good.
- At the end of Key Stage 4 standards are below average. In 2006 all students who took English at GCSE achieved an award although none attained the highest level. The percentage of students attaining A*-C grades in GCSE English was significantly below average.
- Student make satisfactory progress during their time at the college with most progress made in Key Stage 3 and significantly less in Key Stage 4.
- As the sixth form is small and relatively new, very few students take English beyond GCSE.
- Improving the attainment of boys, particularly those of higher ability, is a current priority for improvement for the college.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in English is satisfactory.

- Teaching is satisfactory with some that is good. Typically, planning builds on prior learning is at the appropriate level and lessons are well structured.
- Relationships are good and students behave well, although some opportunities are missed to engage them actively in their learning.
- Students respond enthusiastically to challenging questions which encourage them to explain, develop and support their views with evidence from text. However, the quality of questioning is inconsistent.
- The effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) motivates students, particularly those who find writing difficult.
- Students have regular assessments so know what level they are on. They have clear targets for improvement which are reviewed systematically. There are some inconsistencies in the quality of marking. The best is focused on how students can improve their work.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in English is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work have been revised to provide a more relevant and interesting curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 3. They contain clear objectives and success criteria covering all aspects of English, including ideas for drama and ICT.
- Improvements to make the curriculum at Key Stage 4 more relevant and balance the demands of preparation for examinations are not yet fully embedded.

- Many students are positive about English and particularly enjoy role play and debate. They are less positive about extended writing.
- A good range of additional study resources for students, specifically linked to units of work, have recently been provided on the college Virtual Learning Environment.
- Students value the library club and revision classes run during the holidays. They particularly enjoyed the visiting theatre group that brought 'Much Ado about Nothing' alive but enrichment activities in general are limited.

Leadership and management of English

Leadership and management in English are good.

- Self evaluation is honest and rigorous. There is a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in English based on the systematic analysis of performance information and monitoring evidence.
- The English improvement plan is relevant and specific with clear, measurable targets for success. It provides a clear sense of direction for the department.
- Monitoring and evaluation activities are reflective and systematic although there is a lack of regular, focused lesson observations to support the development of priorities for improvement.
- The impact of good leadership in English is evident in the increased enjoyment and achievement of students at Key Stage 3 as a result of a more relevant curriculum and additional support for reading.

Provision for poetry

Provision for poetry is good.

- Poetry is built effectively into schemes of work. Poems studied are relevant and interesting to students so they respond positively saying they enjoy reading and writing poetry.
- Teachers have a good understanding of genre and give useful feedback to students on how their poems can be improved by the inclusion of a varied range of poetic techniques.
- Pupils are given good opportunities to write their own poems although few are published.

Inclusion

Inclusion in English is satisfactory.

- Provision for English meets the needs of most learners although boys and more able students are not always sufficiently challenged or actively engaged so do not make the progress expected.

- Improvement targets are set for all students and they are given good guidance, for example on review days, so that they know what they need to do to improve.
- The accelerated reading programme has been introduced to improve levels of reading at Key Stage 3 and this is having a positive impact on improving student reading skills and enjoyment.
- Mentoring for the most vulnerable students ensures they complete course work on time.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the progress students make by increasing their active involvement in lessons and developing more challenging questioning
- developing systematic, focused lesson observations linked to English priorities for improvement
- increasing opportunities to enrich the English curriculum through clubs, visits and visitors
- seeking opportunities to publish students' poetry.

Business education

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

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in business education is satisfactory.

- GCSE applied business results in 2006 were well below average and a substantial number of students did not make the progress expected of them.
- The college has replaced the GCSE course with the National Diploma in business and the indications are that students who have just completed Year 11 should achieve a great deal better than the previous cohort. Students in Year 9 and 10 taking the National Diploma are making at least satisfactory progress.
- Standards and achievement in GCSE business and communications and in GCE applied business are satisfactory. Completion rates for GCE AS and A2 applied business are good.
- Coursework is generally thorough but often lacks analysis and evaluation, which prevents students from achieving higher grades.
- The Year 9 and 10 students interviewed, who were not taking business examination courses, had a limited understanding of personal finance and economics and business.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in business education is satisfactory.

- Students enjoy their business courses and have positive attitudes to learning.
- The business teacher has good subject knowledge. The lesson observed was well planned and involved a good range of activities that engaged students' interests.
- Students feel well supported and receive additional help when needed. They are given good oral feedback but would benefit from more written comments on their work to show what they need to do to improve.
- Students have too few opportunities to engage directly with employers and local businesses.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum in business education is satisfactory.

- The National Diploma course is popular and oversubscribed. The college also provides GCSE business and communications and a business with French course is being introduced in September 2007.
- GCE applied business is the only post-16 course offered in the subject and it attracts a small number of students.
- There is a well organised programme of work experience for all students in Year 10. Plans are in place to link placements for business students more directly with their National Diploma course. The college is developing a range of contacts with employers to enrich the curriculum and provide mentors for students.
- Enterprise education is at an early stage of development and the college's audit has identified gaps in the provision for economic and business understanding and personal finance education. Year 9 students have benefited from a successful enterprise day and other students have the opportunity to develop their enterprise skills, for example through work in food technology.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of business education are satisfactory and there is the capacity to bring about further improvement.

- Business courses are well organised and supported by clear programmes of study. A useful staff handbook, containing appropriate policies and guidance, is in place.
- The subject self-evaluation identifies some of the strengths and weakness but lacks a rigorous analysis of performance data and the quality of teaching and learning.
- There is good tracking and monitoring of student progress and appropriate interventions are made when students appear to be under achieving or falling behind with their work.

- The business teacher is involved in a good range of professional development activities, including becoming a moderator for an awarding body, and there is evidence that this is leading to improvement.
- The appointment of an enterprise co-ordinator in June 2006 reflects the college's commitment to developing this aspect of the curriculum. A useful audit of provision has been undertaken but the college has not yet established a common understanding of enterprise education and students' and learning outcomes are not identified or assessed.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory.

- Business courses in Key Stage 4 are open to all students and attract a wide cross-section of abilities. There is currently no provision of foundation or level 1 courses in business at Key Stage 4, or level 2 courses in the sixth form.
- There is no evidence of underachievement by particular groups of students, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing students' skills of analysis and evaluation to help them achieve higher grades in examinations
- providing more opportunities for business students to engage directly with employers
- ensuring more rigorous department self-evaluation, drawing on examination data and other evidence
- developing a common understanding of enterprise education and identifying and assessing the learning outcomes students are expected to achieve.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English and 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 Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

David Butler
Her Majesty's Inspector