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Dear Dr Nicholls

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Business Education and Art

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with Stephen Long HMI on 20-21 May to look at work in business education and art.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit for business education had a particular focus on economic and business understanding for all students.

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 parts of seven lessons.

Business Education

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

Achievement and standards

Students' achievement in examination courses is satisfactory.

- In 2007 standards in business and economics courses were average and achievement satisfactory. Nearly all Year 11 students take a course in 'preparation for working life' equivalent to half a GCSE and results are very good.

- Classroom relationships are often good and older students have positive attitudes towards their courses.

Quality of teaching and learning of business education

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

- The teaching observed during the inspection was good in two of the four lessons and satisfactory in the rest. Students benefit from teachers' confident and wide subject knowledge and the use of relevant and interesting examples drawn from the real world. Many students find their courses enjoyable and interesting. However, the quality of teaching is inconsistent, especially below the sixth form. In the less effective lessons, the tasks set are the same for all students, resulting in insufficient challenge for higher attaining students and a lack of engagement in learning by lower attaining students.
- There is very good feedback in the sixth form on written work through marking and individual discussion. This is accompanied by regular progress checks so that students are clear about how well they are doing and how to improve. However, in Year 10 the quality of assessment is inconsistent and some students are unclear about how to improve.
- Most lessons are well organised and students value the wide range of well prepared resources. There is frequent use of computers to aid learning through, for example, research and the use of spreadsheets. Sixth formers especially appreciate the computer based resources to assist their private study and revision.

Quality of curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is satisfactory.

- Examination courses meet the needs and interests of students well. The courses offered are popular and students are positive about them.
- Students are able to go on visits which are relevant to aspects of their business courses. However, these are 'one off' trips and there are relatively few opportunities within the business and economics courses for students to engage with the 'real' world through direct contact with employers. The school is rightly considering how the long work experience placements students undertake as part of their applied GCSE business course can be used more productively.
- There is increasing provision in the curriculum for students not following examination courses in business to develop their economic and business understanding and take part in enterprise activities. The assessment of students' economic and business understanding and financial capability is underdeveloped, although some aspects are assessed through the 'preparation for working life' certificate.

Leadership and management of business education

The leadership and management of business education are satisfactory.

- Day to day management is good. There are well produced resources. The department's leadership has had to work exceptionally hard to maintain standards during a time of staffing difficulty in the subject and is now supporting one newly qualified and one trainee teacher. Their progress is testimony to the effective mentoring taking place. Lesson observations and discussions with staff suggest good capacity to improve as the department becomes more established.
- Currently the quality of teaching and learning across the department is variable. Frequent staff changes have led to weaknesses in the on-going assessment of students' work and imposed additional burdens on the head of department in assessing coursework.
- The department's leadership is self critical and has a good understanding of the department's strengths and areas for improvement. Opportunities for professional development in improving teaching have been limited.
- The wider area of economic and business understanding for all students is staffed by specialists in the field of citizenship and personal, social and health education. The programme is becoming increasingly coherent and staff are enthusiastic in seeking ways to make the provision more effective. However, the school has not yet identified a set of learning outcomes against which provision can be monitored.

Areas for improvement in business education, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that teaching consistently engages, challenges and supports students
- providing more opportunities for students to engage directly with local businesses
- identifying the learning outcomes students are expected to gain in business and enterprise education across the school and developing better systems to monitor and evaluate their progress.

Art and Design

The overall effectiveness of art and design was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in art and design

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- From average starting points, students make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9, with the girls achieving more than the boys. While they develop good control of materials, their ability to evaluate and refine

their work is more limited, especially for the boys, because they do not always understand well enough the purpose for which it is being made.

- In Years 10 and 11 the girls continue to outperform the boys but progress quickens for both and they achieve a higher proportion of GCSE grades A*-C than is seen nationally. The strongest work, often from observation, makes good use of the skills learned earlier. However the extent to which students develop uniquely individual and creative outcomes is variable and weaker among the boys.
- Sixth form students make satisfactory progress and standards are average on AS- and A-level fine art courses. The students develop suitably personal responses to starting points, some of which is of high quality although largely within a narrow tradition of figurative work rather than reflecting a broader exploration of fine arts practice.

Quality of teaching and learning in art and design

Teaching and learning in art and design are satisfactory.

- Teachers manage lessons well through good organisation of time and resources. Students' behaviour is good because teachers' expectations are clear, relationships are positive and the atmosphere in the art rooms is calm.
- Techniques are demonstrated well by teachers, as reflected in students' good observational drawing. References to the work of other artists, while narrow in scope, are researched well by teachers. However the students' understanding of key aspects of these artists' work is sometimes too superficial to support their own learning and teachers do not consistently identify or tackle this.
- For younger students there is sometimes too little adaptation of lesson content or teaching style to meet their varying needs. For older years, teaching rightly includes more individual guidance, resulting in the high proportion of GCSE grades at C or above. Nevertheless, opportunities are missed at all ages to challenge and nurture students' capacity to think more independently about their work.
- Teachers are successful in supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities so that they make satisfactory progress. Lesson planning usually notes students requiring additional support although there are inconsistencies in the extent of what is provided.
- Teaching is seldom enriched or broadened by including other perspectives such as from artists, craftspeople or gallery educators.

Quality of the curriculum in art and design

The curriculum in art and design is satisfactory.

- Students are introduced to a reasonable range of two and three dimensional materials although they have too few opportunities to use digital technologies. Learning is appropriately revisited, for example younger students' learning about colour is reinforced in later years.

- Satisfactory emphasis is given to aspects of fine art such as drawing and painting set against limited design or craft-based content. Where design is taught, it is poorly coordinated with design technology.
- Students explore a satisfactory range of art genre, including still life and the human form. However their exposure to contemporary approaches to these and other themes is too narrow.
- Students' response to the curriculum is satisfactory with reasonable numbers opting for it at examination level. Boys opt in smaller numbers because they find the subject less engaging in Years 7 to 9.
- While the curriculum rightly offers students more freedom to develop their own ideas as they get older, some lack the ability to do so. This is compounded by the relatively narrow range of experiences offered which impedes them in selecting the best way to express their ideas.
- Satisfactory curriculum adaptation takes place for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This is better for older students due to the more individual nature of teachers' support.
- Gifted and talented students are identified and some additional provision made for them although this is not consistent in all classes.
- The department is starting to develop better links with the community such as completing a mural for a local primary school. Further progress is required to develop such work, including with local artists so that students are aware of creative practice going on around them.

Leadership and management of art and design

The leadership and management of art and design are satisfactory.

- Day to day management of the department is good. Resources are well organised and staff communicate well as a team.
- Monitoring and evaluation refers to a satisfactory range of evidence including students' work, examination data and lesson observation. The outcomes are used reasonably well to inform development planning and to ensure students make satisfactory progress. The impact of past actions is, for example evident in the reversal of a dip in boys' achievement at GCSE last year. However, the analysis of provision lacks depth, for example not identifying that the narrow curriculum is restricting students' achievement.
- Subject development planning contains some appropriate aims, including whole school issues; but is not a comprehensive reflection of all that needs to be improved. Criteria for success in the development plan are not stated clearly enough to enable the progress of the subject to be checked and the actions to be taken lack detail.

Subject issue: the quality of assessment and its impact on students' progress and creativity is judged to be satisfactory.

- Teachers' use of assessment information about students' attainment to adapt lesson content is inconsistent, particularly in Years 7 to 9.

- The students have satisfactory skills in assessing their work and deciding how to improve it. They are involved in reviewing their work regularly but the usefulness of the goals they set varies because they do not always understand the criteria for successful work. Older students' awareness of their long term examination objectives is adequate but sometimes too superficial, particularly among boys, to guide their decision making. This restricts their individual creativity.
- Teachers' assessment of students' progress in lessons is satisfactory. Questioning is sometimes used well to test understanding and tackle misconceptions. Individual discussions between students and teachers are regular and valued by students, especially on examination courses.
- Marking is of variable usefulness in guiding improvement.
- Tracking students' progress and identifying underachievement is satisfactory although the system used between Years 7 and 9 has been introduced recently and its impact has yet to be evaluated fully.
- Assessment information is used adequately to probe the effectiveness of subject provision. There is scope for this to be more rigorous for example in analysing the achievement of different groups of students and their responses to the curriculum.

Areas for improvement in art and design, which we discussed, included:

- improving boys' ability to evaluate and refine their work in order to fulfil intentions which they understand clearly
- giving students access to a broader range of approaches to making art, craft and design, including contemporary and digital practice
- making better use of assessment information, including students' targets, to plan teaching and the curriculum to meet their needs
- improving subject monitoring and evaluation to comprehensively identify areas requiring improvement, plan actions and measure their impact

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop business education and art 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

Adrian Lyons
Her Majesty's Inspector