

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr J Fawcett
Headteacher
Swanwick Hall School
The Green
Swanwick
Alfreton
DE55 1AE

Dear Mr Fawcett

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: business education

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 10 and 11 November 2009 to look at work in business education.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject the visit had a particular focus on the impact of 14 to 19 developments in 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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of business education, including the development of students' economic and business understanding and financial capability, is satisfactory.

Achievement in business education

Achievement in business education is satisfactory.

- Attainment, as indicated by examination results, is average and most students make progress that is generally in line with expectations, with no significant underachievement. Standards are improving in the sixth form.
- Success rates for post-16 students are satisfactory.

- Most students have positive attitudes towards learning and, with few exceptions, behave well.
- By the end of Year 11, students not taking business examination courses develop good economic and business understanding and financial capability.

Quality of teaching in business education

The quality of teaching in business education is good.

- The great majority of teaching is good and none is inadequate. Lessons are planned well. Teachers use an appropriate range of activities to effectively engage students and meet their different needs and interests. The pace of lessons is usually good.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are confident in their teaching. Good priority is given to promoting the correct use of technical vocabulary by students.
- Skilful questioning challenges students' thinking and most respond well and readily share their knowledge and opinions.
- Effective use is made of information and communication technology to support teaching and learning where appropriate.
- Teaching is often linked to real-world examples. Particularly good use is made of recent and topical case-study material.
- Students are supported well in their learning and receive good feedback on their work so they understand the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in business education

The quality of the curriculum in business education is good.

- Examination courses in business meet the needs of the majority of students and there are clear progression routes for students with different levels of attainment.
- At Key Stage 4, most students study an applied or vocational course. There are some good opportunities for students taking these courses to engage directly with employers. However, for examination courses in business, links with employers are less well-developed.
- There are many good opportunities for students to develop their economic and business understanding, financial capability and enterprise skills. 'Stop the Clock' days, work experience, the new Year 9 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics programme (STEM) and the wide range of enrichment activities make significant contributions.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in business education

The effectiveness of leadership and management in business education is satisfactory.

- The department has been successful in raising students' achievement in the sixth form. Students' progress towards meeting challenging targets is monitored effectively and appropriate interventions are made when there is underachievement.
- Self-evaluation is in place, but has a narrow focus on examination performance.
- Departmental planning is sound and schemes of work are in place.
- Staff performance is monitored and good support is provided where necessary.
- There is a developing overview of the provision to promote economic and business understanding and financial capability across the school. However, learning outcomes are not currently assessed systematically.

Subject issue: the impact of 14 to 19 developments in business education

- There is good provision in business education to meet the needs and interests of most students.
- The school has introduced new courses, and is working in partnership with other institutions to improve provision further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- enabling students taking examination courses to have frequent engagement with local businesses and employers within their programmes
- developing a coherent system to track and monitor students' economic and business understanding and financial capability, as they move through the school.

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

Yours sincerely

Vic Chivers
Her Majesty's Inspector