

Report summary

Economics, business and enterprise education

A summary of inspection evidence: April 2007 to March 2010

Economics, business and enterprise education is about equipping children and young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding to help them make sense of the complex and dynamic economic, business and financial environment in which they live. It should help them leave school well-informed and well-prepared to function as consumers, employees and potential employers.

This report evaluates the effectiveness of economics, business and enterprise education in 28 primary and 100 secondary schools across England, five of which were special schools, in a range of geographical contexts from April 2007 to March 2010. None of the schools had been judged inadequate in their last institutional inspection. Over 250 lessons in formally assessed economics and business education courses, and approximately 120 lessons relating to enterprise education, were observed in secondary schools during the period of the survey. The report also draws on evidence from 33 institutional college inspections between September 2009 and August 2010 to evaluate the quality of business, administration and law (sector subject area 15) education and training for 16–18-year-olds in colleges.

Part A of the report focuses on the quality of formally assessed economics and business education in the secondary schools visited and colleges inspected. It includes an evaluation of the impact on learning for students studying vocational business courses that are wholly or mainly assessed by internally set and marked coursework. It also evaluates the impact on learning for students studying the economics and business management modules of the International Baccalaureate. Part B explores the quality of whole-school enterprise education and its impact on the economic and business understanding, and enterprise and financial capability, of children and young people in the primary and secondary schools visited.

The overall effectiveness of economics and business education was judged to be at least satisfactory in all the secondary schools visited and good or outstanding in 78 of the 100 visited. Of the schools with business and enterprise specialist status, 29 of the 33 visited were good or outstanding. Most secondary schools visited offered formally assessed economics and/or business courses. Business courses, in

particular, were popular options at Key Stage 4 and post-16, with examination results improving in line with other subjects. However, even when provision was good, a number of common weaknesses were evident. There were insufficient opportunities for students to engage directly with businesses and employers; the use of teachers' questioning to extend and deepen understanding was often weak; and subject-specific professional development for teachers was patchy.

In 30 of the 39 schools inspected for vocational business courses, that were assessed wholly or mainly by internally set and marked assignments, inspectors identified a serious problem. Despite good results, the quality of students' work, their knowledge and understanding, and their ability to apply learning to unfamiliar contexts and to demonstrate higher level skills, were often weak. This was because of the rather narrow and simplistic approach to the identification of assessment criteria that was common on such courses, and the fact that assignments were designed only to ensure that students were able to demonstrate these criteria in their written submissions. This resulted in an atomistic approach to the development and demonstration of knowledge and understanding, which took no account of the quality of learning. Evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of written work and discussion with students brings into question the case for claiming that such courses are equivalent to between two and four single award, traditionally examined GCSEs at Key Stage 4.

The provision for business, administration and law in 14 of the 33 colleges inspected was judged to be good or outstanding. It was satisfactory in 16 and inadequate in three. Of the 33 colleges inspected, 10 were sixth form colleges and 23 were general further education colleges.

Enterprise education is regarded as part of the statutory work-related learning curriculum at Key Stage 4 but there is no statutory requirement to provide enterprise education at Key Stages 1 to 3. Despite this, schools generally regarded it as an essential element of the whole-school curriculum, helping to prepare children and young people for their futures within the complex and dynamic economic, business and financial environment in which they live.

All of the secondary schools visited made at least satisfactory provision for enterprise education. The provision for, and development of, all students' enterprise capability (for example their problem-solving and teamworking skills, including negotiation, cooperation, planning and organisation) were often good. However, the provision for, and development of, all students' economic and business understanding and their financial capability were less well developed and often weak. As a result, students often had only vague ideas about the economy, interest rates and their impact, recession, inflation, why prices vary and the ownership of companies.

All of the primary schools visited made at least some, and often good, provision for developing pupils' understanding of the role of money and touched on aspects of basic economic and business understanding and enterprise capability. Less than two thirds of the primary and secondary schools visited had a coherent programme of

enterprise education to develop economic and business understanding and enterprise and financial capability for all children and young people. Only a quarter of the secondary schools and only half of the primary schools visited had identified learning outcomes for this area of the curriculum and had systems in place to assess children's and young people's progress in developing their economic and business understanding or their enterprise and financial capability.

Key findings

Formally assessed economics and business courses

- In over two thirds of the secondary schools visited, achievement was judged to be good or outstanding in relation to the courses and qualifications followed. Students taking business courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16 often gained higher grades in this subject than in their other subjects.
- Teaching of economics and business education was at least satisfactory in all of the secondary schools visited. It was good or outstanding in just over three quarters, where teachers had strong subject knowledge, and made effective use of real-world examples and of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Teachers' use of questioning, to develop and extend students' learning, was a weakness in those schools where teaching was judged to be only satisfactory and was also a less successful feature in the 67 schools where teaching was otherwise judged to be good. Questioning was too often restricted to the recall of information, so that opportunities were missed to gain a fuller indication of students' knowledge and understanding, and to develop the higher level skills of application, analysis and evaluation.
- The curriculum for economics and business education was good or outstanding in 86 of the schools visited. Most schools offered a wide range of economics and business courses to meet the needs of individual students, with suitable progression routes from Key Stage 4 to post-16.
- Over a third of the schools failed to provide sufficient opportunities for students to engage directly with local businesses.
- Most schools benefited from the in-service training provided by awarding bodies that related to specific examination courses. However, provision of subject-based professional development specifically to improve the quality of teaching was a weakness, particularly in schools without sixth forms.
- Thirty-nine of the 100 schools visited had introduced vocational courses assessed wholly or mainly by internally set and marked assignments, which were equivalent to between two and four traditional single GCSEs at Key Stage 4. Some students benefited considerably from these vocational courses and demonstrated well-developed knowledge, understanding and skills. However, in 30 of the 39 schools, learning was limited by a focus on completing written assignments to meet narrowly defined assessment criteria, rather than securely developing broader understanding and skills.

- Even coursework that achieved high grades was often descriptive, included little evidence of first-hand research or direct contact with businesses, and lacked evidence of analysis or evaluation. Internal marking against the criteria was accurate, but narrow in scope, and reinforced by predominantly positive external moderation reports.
- Business and enterprise specialist status had a very clear impact. Those specialist schools visited were more effective than others in the provision of formally assessed qualifications in economics and business and of whole-school enterprise education, and had better links with businesses.
- The main strength in the colleges visited was the breadth of courses available. Attainment and progress were common areas of weakness, suggesting that not all learners received appropriate advice in selecting the most suitable courses, given their prior attainment. As in the schools visited, insufficient links with employers was a weakness.

Whole-school enterprise education

- The schools visited did much to promote students' enterprise capability by a whole range of often highly engaging and wide-ranging provision in this area. As a result, in more than half of the schools visited, students were developing good problem-solving and teamworking skills, including negotiation, cooperation, planning and organisation.
- However, in the secondary schools, economic and business understanding and financial capability were not as well developed and were often weak. As a result, students often had only vague ideas about the economy, interest rates and their impact, recession, inflation, why prices vary and the ownership of companies.
- In 23 of the 28 primary schools visited, judgements were made about the quality of teaching in relation to enterprise education. In 16 schools, this was judged to be good or outstanding. In these schools, the effective way in which economics and business understanding and enterprise and financial capability were integrated throughout the primary school curriculum resulted in pupils gaining a good understanding, relative to their age, about money, including earning, spending and saving and the distinction between wants and needs.
- The main weaknesses in whole-school enterprise education provision, both in the primary and secondary schools surveyed, were a lack of coherence and a failure to identify and assess learning outcomes.
- Many of the teachers deployed to deliver aspects of enterprise education were non-specialists, who had little or no training or experience of this area. This limited their confidence and ability to teach effectively. This was particularly the case in relation to economic and business understanding and financial capability for students in the secondary schools.

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