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26 November 2010

Ms G Berry  
Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Berry

### **Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: music**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 10 and 11 November 2010 to look at work in music.

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; and observation of four lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4. Several instrumental lessons were also sampled.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Attainment is broadly average at Key Stage 4 in both the GCSE course and the BTEC First Certificate course, newly introduced last year. The proportion achieving A\* to C grades at GCSE has shown improvement over recent years and is similar to the national average for girls. Work scrutiny, teachers' assessments and lesson observations confirm these broadly average standards. Standards at Key Stage 3 are also typical of those expected nationally.
- In curriculum lessons, students are given opportunities to perform (usually on keyboards), develop musical knowledge in a range of genres and styles, and to create their own musical ideas. Through these activities,

they make satisfactory progress in developing technical skills and musical understanding. Within this, however, students' achievement in singing and vocal work is a weaker aspect.

- Although the proportion of students participating in instrumental or vocal lessons and/or taking part in extra-curricular music activities is satisfactory, the participation tends to tail off towards the upper end of Key Stage 4. Students eligible for free school meals and those who speak English as an additional language are represented but students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are relatively less involved in this wider provision.
- Students enjoy collaborating on group tasks and taking part in ensembles and rehearsals. Several students spoke of their love of and commitment to music, in school and in their lives generally. They value the skills they acquire through performing and through composing their own pieces, and appreciate how these can equip them well for their future lives.

### **Quality of teaching in music**

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- The atmosphere in the lessons is supportive and encouraging. This means that students participate willingly, offer ideas and ask for clarification. They are confident to have a go and are not fearful of making mistakes.
- Lesson plans have clear aims based on the musical skills and understanding to be achieved. They include performing, composing and listening activities, but the emphasis is sometimes more in favour of listening and writing than practical work. Lessons tend to follow a similar format with listening activities taking place at the beginning of lessons, sometimes for up to half a lesson. This hinders the extent to which students work as musicians and deepen their musical responses and understanding through practical music-making.
- Students' coursework is assessed thoroughly; written comments are specific and helpful in guiding students on how to improve their performances and compositions. This is particularly notable in GCSE and BTEC assignments. However, assessments are not used as well to guide planning in Key Stage 3, when more could be expected of able students, especially those who learn instruments and already read music well.

### **Quality of the curriculum in music**

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The schemes of work for both Key Stages 3 and 4 support clear progression across the different elements of the music curriculum. The GCSE course has been re-introduced in Year 10 this year. This and the BTEC First Certificate music course mean that the department is providing for a wider range of students' needs. No sixth form students are currently following examination courses.

- There is a variety of musical ensembles for instrumentalists and the school's concerts and other musical events are popular with students and parents. Information and communication technology is an integral part of the music curriculum in both Key Stages 3 and 4. There is less attention to developing singing, which is not a routine, ongoing feature of each half termly unit of work or the extra-curricular provision.
- Recording is used for assessing students' work at the end of a six-week unit. However, it is not used as successfully to allow students to listen to work in progress, develop their aural skills and modify their ideas, or to develop their performances and compositions further.
- The department manages its own programme of instrumental and vocal tuition that is provided by a team of instrumental teachers, all of whom are employed by the school. A satisfactory range of tuition is provided, including music theory classes.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in music**

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- The head of faculty has significantly raised the profile of music over recent years. This is appreciated by senior leaders and students. Standards at Key Stage 4 have shown improvement and there is good capacity to improve the work of the department further.
- Effective links have been established with the instrumental teachers. Team work is strong and the instrumental teachers contribute well to achievement in music. They do this in a number of ways, including coaching and preparing parts for ensembles, preparing solo performances for concerts and BTEC units and leading lunchtime and after-school music ensembles.
- Musical events form an important part of school life both through in-school events and concerts, and those where students participate in community initiatives, such as the annual local community music and arts festival. However, the head of faculty recognises that the rich resource of professional musicians and groups that operate within easy reach is not used by the department as fully as it could be, particularly to enrich the provision in Key Stage 3. Similarly, the head of faculty has had limited involvement in music professional development opportunities over the last two years.
- The school's own monitoring of the effectiveness of the department is more generous than the findings of this inspection. Monitoring has largely focused on the extent to which pupils are participating and responding to the lessons as opposed to the musical learning and outcomes. There is no system in place for formally monitoring the work of the school's instrumental teaching team.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- strengthening singing and vocal work at all key stages

- reviewing the curriculum lessons' format and balance so that students work more effectively as musicians on tasks that integrate practical music-making and listening skills for a greater proportion of the time
- ensuring that there is a clear musical focus when monitoring the effectiveness of lessons, and including the instrumental teaching team in the school's monitoring programme.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in the school.

As I 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Margaret Dickinson**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**