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Mrs M Matthews  
Headteacher  
St Bede's Catholic School and Sixth Form College  
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Dear Mrs Matthews

### **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 21 and 22 September 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 learners; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of seven curriculum lessons, a violin group lesson and a rehearsal of the string ensemble.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. This judgement recognises the improvements made over the past year, including increased uptake in Key Stages 4 and 5 and substantial investment in new resources. However, you recognise correctly that a further significant amount of improvement is required, particularly in participation rates and in curriculum planning, before music can be considered as meeting the high expectations for outstanding provision and outcomes that have been set in your school.

#### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- In Key Stage 3, standards remain below average because of the limited breadth and depth of the planned curriculum, particularly in the range of musical contexts that the students experience. Nevertheless, students make satisfactory progress in completing the tasks set and enjoy participating in lessons.

- While their achievement has been good, the proportions of students opting for the GCSE course in Key Stage 4 have been below average for the past three years. However, numbers have increased this year and are now in line with the national average. These students are making satisfactory progress.
- Similarly, the number of students studying music in the sixth form has increased significantly, due to the introduction of the Music Technology course at the start of this term. It is too early to judge students' progress in this course, but achievement at A-level Music is satisfactory.
- The proportion of students participating in additional instrumental or vocal lessons or taking part in extra-curricular music is lower than that expected given the school's context, but improving. Students from all groups participate although those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or known to be in receipt of free school meals are noticeably underrepresented.

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

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- All lessons include practical music-making, which engages students well and has increased their enthusiasm for music over the past year. Equally, though, parts of lessons are frequently dominated by teachers' verbal explanations and theoretical presentations. While students' behaviour is usually good, in these episodes they are too passive and this hinders their further musical development.
- Regular recordings are made of students' composing and performing work. Work is assessed, including by the students themselves; however, teachers do not use these assessments sufficiently to improve musical standards further or to plan lessons that set increasingly higher expectations of musical understanding.

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

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Appropriate curriculum time is provided for music in Key Stage 3. In addition to the timetabled option, an additional GCSE class is provided after school. This has helped to increase and widen participation, and is to teachers' credit.
- The head of department and his colleague are rewriting the schemes of work. In all key stages, these and other associated planning documents cover curriculum and course requirements very broadly and are only just adequate enough to support students' satisfactory progress. A key area for improvement is to accelerate this writing process and ensure that the music curriculum is planned and resourced thoroughly throughout the school, particularly in providing a good balance of musical contexts and in making more explicit the high musical standards and understanding that students could achieve, rather than the activities that they are to complete.

- A reasonable range of instrumental lessons is provided by the local authority music service. A well-established brass ensemble is in place; the string group has recently re-formed with the wind-band due to start rehearsals again shortly. Curriculum lessons at all key stages include singing but choral ensemble work is underdeveloped. Students appreciate greatly the popular musical-theatre productions, and also the good support given through rehearsal facilities for student-run rock bands. Nevertheless, increasing and widening participation in these additional activities is another key area for improvement.

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

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

- The head of department has been in post for a year. Senior staff and students are right to recognise the improvements in provision and students' enjoyment of music that have been made in that time. However, the department's self-evaluation is over-generous; no aspect of provision or outcomes is better than just satisfactory. The music development plan correctly identifies most of the main issues and priorities for improvement.
- Governors and school leaders have given good support through substantial funding for refurbishment and new resources, particularly in information and communication technology. Teaching is monitored regularly. Although partnerships with the local authority music service are well-established for instrumental teaching, you recognise that further significant support is required to improve provision, particularly with assessment, curriculum development, and increasing participation.
- Similarly, while there are some links with feeder primary schools, including through the school brass group and transfer of information about students involved in instrumental lessons, music leaders have very limited knowledge and understanding of the music curriculum across phases, particularly in light of the national instrumental and vocal initiatives in Key Stage 2.

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

- by January 2011, initiating and securing curriculum links in partnership with feeder primary schools to build on students' previous musical experiences when they join Year 7
- by April 2011, ensuring that the music curriculum is securely and thoroughly planned throughout the school, including explicit detail about the high expectations for what students should achieve in each stage of their musical understanding
- by September 2011, in partnership with the local authority music service, significantly increasing the numbers participating in good quality instrumental and vocal tuition and extra-curricular choirs and ensembles, particularly students from vulnerable groups.

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. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Mark Phillips**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**