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Mr D McFadden  
Headteacher  
The London Oratory School  
Seagrave Road  
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Dear Mr McFadden

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 11 and 12 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 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; rehearsals of the girls' choir, the school choir, the chamber orchestra, and a pupil rock band; observation of nine curriculum lessons; and visits to four instrumental and vocal lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is outstanding. Notwithstanding pupils' high levels of musical and general ability when they join the school, outstanding provision enables exceptionally large numbers to participate in musical activities and achieve the highest standards. Leadership and management are outstanding, not only because of the superb musical direction offered throughout the school but also because there is a clear, accurate knowledge of what can be done to improve provision even further.

### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is outstanding.

- Standards of singing throughout the school are exceptional. The musical quality of the Schola Cantorum is world-class; the achievements of other vocal groups are also outstanding. Vocal work is an integral part of curriculum lessons and does much to help develop pupils' musical understanding.

- Music, vocal work in particular, makes an exceptional contribution to the Catholic liturgy that is central to the school's life and ethos.
- An extraordinary number of pupils receive additional tuition on a musical instrument in school. Half the school population is learning at least one instrument; many learn two. As remarkably, all groups of pupils benefit equally from this provision, including those from different ethnic backgrounds and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Pupils on the specialist music course in Key Stage 2 make excellent progress, particularly in developing the aural skills that prepare them well for further musical study.
- Overall, pupils' achievement is outstanding in Key Stage 3 although they make much better progress in understanding western art-music styles than they do in their knowledge of popular and world music styles. This is recognised as an area for development in the school's music action plan.
- The proportion of pupils opting for music examination courses in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is significantly above average, and standards in these courses are high. Many take these examinations earlier than is usually the case, enabling them to study for further qualifications. Sixth form pupils also take a significant part in the wider musical life of the school, including leading activities and acting as musical mentors to younger pupils.

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

Overall, the quality of teaching in music is outstanding.

- A significant amount of teaching is outstanding, for two important reasons. Firstly, teachers are themselves outstanding musicians and constantly model these skills to demonstrate the high musical standards that pupils are expected to achieve. Secondly, these lessons are planned with a clear focus on the development of pupils' musical understanding, particularly through the integration of performing and listening work. These features are present in both curriculum lessons and ensemble rehearsals, and are significant reasons why pupils make outstanding progress.
- A small proportion of curriculum teaching does not reach these outstanding standards. In these lessons, although music is modelled well, too much time is spent by the teacher talking to the class, with the consequence that pupils do not engage in musical activity early enough.
- A strong focus on musical understanding is evident in the assessment of pupils' work. The department has developed a simple assessment scheme that focuses on the overall musical quality of pupils' responses, rather than on individual skills or competencies. Recordings are made of pupils' work, although the school knows that these could be used more methodically during lessons and to monitor pupils' progress, particularly in Key Stage 3.

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

The quality of the curriculum in music is outstanding.

- There is generous timetabled provision for curriculum music in Key Stages 2 and 3, taught by six full-time members of staff. The schemes of work give a clear overview of the musical understanding that pupils are expected to develop as they progress through the school.
- There is an excellent range of co-curricular activities for pupils of all ages and abilities to enjoy. Although these are mostly in the western art-music tradition, including the junior and senior orchestras and wind bands, there is also a thriving jazz band and opportunities are available for pupil-led rock bands to rehearse.
- Accommodation for music is outstanding and is kept in very good order. There is good provision for information and communication technology (ICT), although the school recognises that this is an area that could be developed further – in particular, to enable pupils' greater access to real-time recording and sequencing to help with composing and arranging music.
- Over 40 peripatetic instrumental and vocal teachers are engaged by the school. While the majority of these lessons are paid for by parents, pupils in the Junior House and some senior pupils are awarded music scholarships. A small number of bursaries is also available for pupils whose family financial circumstances make it difficult for parents to meet the full cost of the fees.

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

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

- The depth of musical leadership is remarkable. The Director of Music, Head of Academic Music, and other curriculum teachers all have clearly defined responsibilities for leading key aspects of the school's wider musical life. The department is line-managed by an assistant headteacher who is a qualified musician. Teaching is monitored regularly and there is some good team-teaching, particularly in co-curricular rehearsals. However, more could be done to share the very best teaching practice, to ensure that all curriculum lessons are of the same outstanding quality.
- Senior leadership support for music is excellent. As well as setting high expectations, senior leaders support the department by ensuring that teachers' timetables recognise all musical activity including commitments before and after school, weekend rehearsals, and curriculum teaching.
- Partnerships with the world of professional music are exceptional. In recent years, pupils from the school have performed at the BBC Proms and have featured in a number of commercial recordings. Many of the classroom and peripatetic teachers perform to professional standard, constantly bringing the highest quality of music-making into the school.
- An important reason why the leadership and management of music are outstanding is because the school has a very clear idea of what could be done to make provision even stronger. The department action plan is detailed, apposite and, given the exceptional musical standards already reached, entirely achievable.
- The school has used its expertise and high standards in singing to provide magnificent leadership of vocal work with community groups. As part of the

national singing strategy, and with initial government funding through the Chorister Outreach Programme, the school has provided regular workshops, training events, and performance opportunities for seven local primary schools. In addition, the West London Children's Choir is run by the school on Saturday mornings. The school has continued to provide these opportunities, although the external funding has stopped. For the wider school community, there is also a Choral Society for pupils, parents, staff and friends.

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

- in addition to realising the school's comprehensive development plan for music, ensuring that all curriculum lessons are dominated by active music-making and pupils' aural development.

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**