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Mrs S Watson  
Headteacher  
The Castle School  
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Dear Mrs Watson

### **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 15 and 16 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 three lessons. Five lunchtime or after-school clubs were also observed.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

#### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is good.

- Attainment is high at Key Stage 4. Over the last three years, all students have achieved A\* to C grades and the proportion of A\* and A grades has been significantly above average. Most of the students who take GCSE complete the course in one year, while in Year 10, and make excellent progress. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is not quite as high, though still above average.
- Performing standards are very good and the school has many able, confident and motivated instrumentalists. The standard of singing in the vocal ensembles is good, most notably the four-part choir. Students are

appreciative of the many opportunities they receive and single out several special events over recent years as particularly memorable and enjoyable.

- Students have developed good knowledge about important musical aspects, such as structure, instrumentation, effects and styles. They draw on these well to inform their creative work at GCSE. Students have mature attitudes to their composing. They reflect on and discuss their progress and share their ideas and reasoning, explaining, for example, why they have opted for a particular musical feature or amended their original ideas, as opposed to simply describing what they have done.
- Levels of participation are good in extra-curricular music activities and musical performances. A good proportion of students learn instruments either through the school or privately. Many students are very committed and motivated and immerse themselves fully in the work of the music department. However, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language are not as involved as the other groups represented in the school.

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

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Teaching in Key Stage 4 is highly effective and an important factor in the very good results at this key stage. Teachers expect high standards in lessons and do not accept anything less, paying rigorous attention to detail. Highly effective, focused questioning is used to clarify, remind, extend and challenge. This enables students to develop a good breadth of musical understanding and an in-depth knowledge of the set works at GCSE. Key musical vocabulary is an integral part of students' learning and they apply this well when discussing their own compositions and performances.
- There is careful attention to aural development and critical listening which is routinely evident in many extra-curricular activities and the teaching in Key Stage 4. Teachers and instrumental teachers, who take ensembles, coach effectively and expect the best from the students in terms of musical accuracy and expression.
- The teaching in Key Stage 3 is not as strong at Key Stage 4. In some lessons, tasks are over-directed by the teachers leading to more limited involvement of the students themselves in formulating their ideas and coming to their own decisions about their compositions. The department gathers useful information on students' achievements when they join the school, including which students are already learning instruments. However, this information, together with information from ongoing assessments, is not always used to provide work at the right level for all students. As a result, those who are proficient in one or more instruments make slower progress in some lessons when the activities they are asked to undertake are too easy for them.

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

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- The department organises a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities, encompassing vocal and instrumental ensembles. The music department is a hub of musical activity at lunchtimes and after school. This amounts to a very rich provision for participating students, who appreciate the commitment of the staff and the many opportunities that are open to them to use their skills. These students make good progress in learning how to perform as a member of an ensemble and develop as musicians.
- The Key Stage 4 curriculum is tailored well to students' needs and supports their learning and progress very effectively. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 provides good preparation for Key Stage 4 coursework. However, it does not always fully meet the needs of the most able instrumentalists who are given work that is sometimes too easy, such as very simple notation tasks when they can already read music. The relatively new popular music module in Year 9 is received well by students who enjoy working with recording equipment to create a successful end result.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used to good effect in Key Stage 4 and its use is developing satisfactorily in Key Stage 3 when some pupils use computers to support their compositions and all have the opportunity to learn some basic sound recording skills. The head of faculty has identified ICT as an ongoing priority for the department and recognises that some of the newer resources have not yet had time to have a full impact on students' learning and progress in Key Stage 3.

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

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

- The head of faculty has established a successful music department over the years and music has a strong profile in the school. There is no sense of complacency and opportunities are sought to broaden provision further. The steel band which has started this term is a good example. The leadership of the department is energetic and dynamic. Teamwork is effective, and staff are deployed to activities where their different skills can be used to best effect. Some visiting instrumental teachers contribute strongly to the work of the department in rehearsing and directing ensembles.
- The head of department has a good knowledge of the work of the department, gleaned largely through informal monitoring of the provision. This has had a particularly strong impact on attainment at Key Stage 4 and on the extra-curricular provision. However, there has been more limited monitoring of the effectiveness of the provision in Key Stage 3, particularly for the more able students and for those who do not opt to pursue music courses at Key Stage 4.

- Students have regular opportunities to perform in different contexts, through concerts, tours and festivals and some ensembles have achieved success in local and national festivals over recent years. Students are encouraged to take responsibility and many make a strong contribution through the role of music prefects, 'roadies' and through helping to coach younger students during music clubs. The students' involvement in and appreciation of music is testament to the strong leadership and vision within the department.

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

- monitoring the quality of provision in Key Stage 3 to establish how well it meets the needs of the more able students and those who do not opt to continue with music in Key Stage 4
- monitoring the participation rates of different groups of pupils in instrumental and extra-curricular provision to encourage more pupils from the groups that are currently less well represented.

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

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