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25 November 2010

Mr E Connolly
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Dear Mr Connolly

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 with Margaret Dickinson HMI on 8 and 9 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 and recordings of ensemble performances; analysis of students' work; and observation of seven curriculum lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Standards of work in Key Stage 3 are broadly average. Given that students are of average ability when they join the college, this represents satisfactory progress. Although it is very positive that singing is included in all curriculum lessons, there is not enough part-singing for progress in vocal work to be judged better than satisfactory. Similarly, while students make satisfactory progress in other activities, such as composing and listening, overall achievement is not better because these experiences are not sufficiently joined-up to promote deeper musical understanding.
- The number of students opting for GCSE music is average. Standards achieved are generally above average and these grades show that students make better progress in music than they do in their other subjects. This is

because they are prepared well to meet the examination requirements. However, their deeper understanding, through wider synoptic musical experiences, is less well developed. Preparation for further study in the Sixth Form is therefore only satisfactory.

- The proportions of students participating in extra-curricular activities and instrumental lessons are lower than expected, although more students use the music department's facilities informally out of lesson time. A particular concern is the low number of Sixth Form students taking part in musical activities, either in the curriculum or through extra-curricular activities.

Quality of teaching in music

Overall, the quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Some good teaching was seen during the inspection. In these examples, such as when Year 10 students worked in small groups to make an arrangement of the popular song 'Valerie', learning was good because the great majority of the lesson was spent in practical music-making. Furthermore, students were encouraged to listen to and improve their musical responses, as well as improving their technical skills.
- However, not enough lessons are of this quality. Too often, there are extended periods of teacher-talk at the start of lesson. Teachers are themselves good musicians, but there is not enough modelling in lessons of the musical standards expected. In other lessons, too much time is spent writing about music, rather than experiencing music itself. These issues are a direct result of the way that the curriculum is planned.
- Excellent information and communication technology (ICT) resources are used in music. When used for composing, these are very helpful in encouraging all students to participate and make progress. However, the use of ICT for recording students' work is underdeveloped to track progress or further develop listening skills.
- Assessments are regular, but are based mainly on the technical competencies shown by students, rather than the musical quality of their responses. In vocal work, more emphasis is placed on encouraging participation; much less consideration is given to correcting mistakes and improving the quality of singing. This is a further reason why students' achievement is not better than satisfactory.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 scheme of work covers all curriculum requirements in sufficient breadth and depth. However, it does not show better than a satisfactory understanding of the music progress that students are expected to make between Years 7 and 9; neither does it show sufficient integration between different areas of musical learning. For some projects, blocks of lessons are planned which involve mostly music history and theory work; this approach limits students' musical development and understanding.

- Schemes of work for the examinations in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. Are very broad and require much more detail, particularly if teaching and achievement are to improve further.
- There is a reasonable range of extra-curricular ensembles including the junior and senior wind bands, and the choir. In addition, the department's excellent ICT facilities are made available, outside of lesson time, for students' individual and small-group work.
- A satisfactory range of additional instrumental lessons is offered, from teachers either provided by the local authority music service or engaged directly by the college.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- The music department is well-resourced, particularly for ICT. This is the result of considerable, commendable investment and commitment from governors and senior leaders. Accommodation and resources are managed well by music staff, despite the absence of any technician support.
- Self-evaluation recognises the improvements made to music provision in recent years, and also the strong, disciplined approach to classroom management shown in curriculum lessons. However, judgements are over-generous because they do not give sufficient consideration to the musical quality of teaching or the extent to which the curriculum promotes high musical standards.
- Teachers attend local network meetings regularly and are aware of current issues in secondary music education. Similarly, examination board briefing meetings and courses have been useful in ensuring that coursework requirements are met. However, there is very limited knowledge of issues in primary music education, particularly the national singing and instrumental initiatives. As a result, staff have insufficient knowledge of students' musical experiences before they join in Year 7.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that curriculum plans, and consequently all lessons, have a clear focus on active music-making and students' musical development, with written work used to support rather than dominate learning
- making sure that all teaching and assessment focus on helping students to improve the quality of their musical responses, including in singing, as well as on completing activities
- giving greater consideration to students' musical knowledge and experiences before they join the school by improving the knowledge of the national primary music education initiatives in general and the work of feeder primary schools in particular.

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

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

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector