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Mrs A Burrowes
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Burrowes

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 5 October 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, selected students and the head of Bolton Music Centre; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of five lessons, two of which were jointly observed; and visits to ensemble rehearsals and an African drumming workshop for a class of Year 7 students.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Standards attained by students at the end of Year 11 are above average. Broadly average proportions of both boys and girls study GCSE music. Students make better progress during Years 10 and 11 than they do in Key Stage 3. Observations indicate that these students are particularly confident discussing and comparing different styles of music.
- By the end of Year 9, standards are broadly average in all areas of music learning, including singing. The school recognises that its knowledge of students' attainment prior to starting school in Year 7 is limited. The current system used to measure students' achievement is under review. Overall, students make broadly satisfactory progress.

- Students taking the A-level music and music technology courses attained mixed results in 2010, due in part to staffing difficulties. Links have now been established with another secondary school to provide additional support, especially in the delivery of music technology.
- The proportion of students participating in additional instrumental and vocal lessons or extra-curricular music activities is broadly satisfactory. There are ensembles for different groups of instrumentalists, including choral groups. These are enjoyed by the students who participate in them; however, there are no school bands or orchestras.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Lessons are planned thoroughly. However, in a few lessons, students' prior learning and musical experiences are not always considered. Although most students enjoy lessons, these are, on occasions, driven and shaped by written instructions and worksheets rather than the target language of music. As a result, while most students are able to make a positive response and provide suggestions for improvement, the musical and creative quality of their work is limited, especially at Key Stage 3.
- Questioning is used regularly to test students' understanding of the tasks set, and materials and resources are chosen carefully. Occasionally, some tasks lack clear musical focus and continue for too long. Students try their best but are not always sure of the purpose of the lesson or how to improve.
- Teachers provide effective technical guidance when students use information and communication technology, to enable them to manipulate sounds and use computers successfully to aid their composition work.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is currently inadequate.

- The amount of time given to music lessons in Years 7 to 9 is too variable. School leaders are giving active consideration to the carousel arrangements currently timetabled for Year 9 students. Year 7 students enjoy additional music workshops throughout the year, on a rotational basis. Although some Year 8 classes are taking part in the Musical Futures programme, the school is yet to establish a clear rationale for choosing particular classes for this programme. This variation in the frequency and choice of music lessons contributes to the students' variable progress.
- A broad plan is in place for lessons in Key Stages 4 and 5 which follows the course requirements. Leaders recognise that at present it is insufficiently clear how students' are to develop their musical skills and knowledge systematically.
- Recent refurbishment of the music rooms means that equipment is easily available for both student and staff to use. Further developments are planned so that the number of practice rooms can be increased.

- A broadly satisfactory, but increasing, number of students are involved in the reasonable range of extra-curricular activities which are available.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- The department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and the newly appointed head of subject demonstrates great enthusiasm. You support her well having recently taken over line management responsibilities for the department. This was in direct response to previous staffing and course difficulties and the relative inexperience of the music team. All involved in leading music demonstrate a willingness and determination to give music a higher profile within the school. Nevertheless, at times, leaders' enthusiasm has meant that ideas and initiatives have been accepted without thinking clearly how they will best impact on students' attainment and progress.
- Suitable plans are in place to tackle areas of weakness. For example, you have brokered subject specific support for the department with another secondary school. Leaders are taking more time to develop the subject strategically and to establish a clear direction for improvement. They are also developing an appropriate system to monitor and measure students' musical progress as they move through the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- completing the schemes of work for Key Stages 4 and 5 and ensuring that additional music activities directly impact on students' progress
- ensuring that the elements of good teaching are present in all lessons by:
 - planning learning to meet the needs and abilities of all students
 - making sure that all lessons have a clear musical focus
- implementing appropriate assessment methods to measure and monitor the progress made by students.

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

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector