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Mrs V Keller-Garnett
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Keller-Garnett

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 with Janet Mercer HMI on 13 and 14 December 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; final rehearsals for the school Christmas concert; observation of five curriculum lessons; and visits to individual brass and singing lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

Achievement in music

Overall, achievement in music is good.

- The proportions of students studying for curriculum qualifications in music are well above average in Key Stage 4. Standards in the GCSE course have been high for the past two years. A significantly high number gain the highest grades and make good progress. The BTEC course was examined for the first time at Ashby School in 2010; all students passed, and the proportion of students earning a distinction was above average. In the context of a new course and the numbers involved, this was a commendable achievement.
- Significantly high numbers are studying music in the sixth form. Students make good progress in the traditional A-Level course, where they attain above-average standards. Progress in the A-Level music technology course is satisfactory, with standards in line with national averages.

- Students in the BTEC and A-Level music technology courses make noticeably better progress in developing their knowledge of the technological hardware and software than they do in developing their musical understanding.
- While the proportion who receive additional instrumental or vocal lessons in school is small, many more learn privately outside school. Regular participation in extra-curricular music activities is satisfactory; those playing acoustic instruments and in traditional musical styles participate much more than those playing in popular styles or those following music technology courses. Standards are above average in playing instruments; they are average in singing.
- Students' excellent attitudes to learning play a significant part in helping them to make good progress in music. Completion rates are good and their coursework portfolios are very well-organised. In curriculum lessons and in extra-curricular activities, students show excellent commitment to developing their musical skills and understanding.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Working relationships in lessons are very positive. Teachers have good subject knowledge and resources are organised well.
- While all lessons include practical activities, too much time is spent talking about concepts and activities rather than giving maximum opportunities for students to engage in independent musical learning. These verbal episodes occur most typically at the start of lessons and are heavily dominated by the teacher, with much less dialogue with students. While this approach is effective in providing students with factual knowledge about music theory and history, and knowledge about music technology equipment, it is much less effective in helping them to make creative responses in composing and performing work.
- Students' work is marked regularly and is usefully referenced to examination grade criteria, to help students understand what they have to do to improve their attainment. However, lesson planning does not always take sufficient account of students' differing abilities; too often, lesson activities are planned generally to suit average needs and do not provide alternative approaches for the most or least able.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- A significant reason for the good achievement of students is the good range of curriculum courses on offer. All curriculum options are planned in good detail. This helps students to cover all course content and complete coursework in a timely manner.
- The small programme of additional instrumental and vocal tuition is well-organised. The school recognises the significant part played by additional

tuition received by students outside school, which is organised and paid for by parents, in helping students to succeed and enjoy music.

- There are thriving wind and jazz bands, which perform to a good standard. There is an orchestra, and a show choir has recently started which is enjoyed by a small but enthusiastic group of students and staff. The biannual music theatre production is very popular and there are other occasional opportunities for students to perform, such as the House music events. However, much more prominence is given to traditional musical styles in extra-curricular activities than is given to popular, contemporary musical styles.
- The accommodation for music is spacious. Resources for information and communication technology are outstanding, including excellent recording facilities and sequencing software which are readily available to students on all curriculum courses.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is good.

- Self-evaluation of music is good. Realising that the curriculum was not meeting the needs and interests of all students, the school introduced the new music technology courses and increased significantly the staffing and resourcing of the department. Similar action has been taken with a view to improving the amount and quality of singing, although this work is in the early stages.
- In addition to the two curriculum teachers, other members of staff lead and contribute to music activities; for example, the jazz band is led by the school bursar. However, while there is good involvement of sixth form students in ensemble activities, more use could be made of those with more advanced skills by offering them opportunities to provide musical leadership.
- There are some good partnerships with other local schools, particularly through the organisation of performance events, although less work has taken place on curriculum coordination. There is good involvement in local music education training and networks, but less awareness of national music initiatives and programmes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the musical achievement of music technology students by
 - further raising the overall standards achieved, particularly in the A-level music technology examinations
 - giving more emphasis to the development of students' musical understanding, as well as their knowledge of the technology software and hardware
 - increasing the proportions of music technology students involved in extra-curricular music activities

- improving the quality of teaching by
 - keeping teachers’ verbal presentations succinct, particularly at the start of lessons, so that students can spend more time engaged in musical learning
 - taking greater account of students’ varying needs and musical abilities when planning lessons
- exploring ways of using the abilities and experience of sixth form students more effectively in the leadership of whole-school musical activities.

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