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Mr P Cummings
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cummings

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 17 and 18 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 selected students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; observation of six class lessons, two of which were jointly observed and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. The curriculum organisation in Key Stage 3 does not promote adequate musical progression. There is low participation by students in additional instrumental and vocal tuition, in extra-curricular activities, and in Key Stages 4 and 5. As a result, achievement is inadequate. Leadership and management are also inadequate, because they fail to recognise or deal with key weaknesses in provision and achievement.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- The proportion of students taking GCSE music is low compared to that found nationally. Positively, though, those students who took GCSE music in 2010, made good progress reaching, or in some cases exceeding, their target grades. As a result, standards at the end of Year 11 in 2010, for

these students, were above average. Their attainment in the listening part of the examination is, and has been for the last three years, the weakest aspect when compared to their performing and composing skills.

- Lesson observations and students' work show that musical understanding on entry to Year 7 is below average; however, students make inadequate progress and standards are low at the end of Year 9. This is because students have considerable gaps in their knowledge of music due to the inadequate curriculum provision. The quality of singing is well below that expected.
- Students enjoy belonging to the choir and the vocal group as well as preparing for the regular end-of-term concerts. Relationships in these groups are positive and students welcome opportunities to practise and work together in ensembles. However, overall, levels of participation by students in ensembles and additional lessons are unsatisfactory

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is broadly satisfactory.

- Teaching in the majority of lessons seen was judged satisfactory. Lessons are well organised and most students try diligently and do their best to complete the tasks set. Working relationships are positive and students support each other well. However, students make no better than satisfactory musical progress in lessons as teachers give little consideration to what they are to learn. Too often, increasing technical difficulty (rather than increasing musical understanding) is the only measure used to judge students' progress.
- Music lessons are planned to include a variety of activities. However, due to weaknesses in curriculum planning, students struggle to recall or link prior learning and musical ideas to new work.
- Students are encouraged to perform to their peers and audio recordings are made at the end of each project. However, students are unable to use these recordings when they are composing to make musical improvements to the overall quality of their work.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- The scheme of work for students in Key Stage 3 is not sufficiently well planned to ensure that students' musical skills and knowledge are developed systematically and progressively. This is compounded by the carousel timetable arrangements in Years 7 and 8, together with inequalities of provision for different groups of students in Year 9, which also lead to discontinuity in learning. Musical concepts and traditions are taught in isolation with insufficient links made between them, and singing is underrepresented. Students are correct in feeling inadequately prepared for the requirements of the GCSE music course in Key Stage 4.

- Information and communication technology (ICT) resources are insufficient. Computers are used to produce PowerPoint presentations and to research information from the internet, but statutory requirements for using ICT creatively in music in Key Stage 3 are not met. Students report that they would welcome more variety of sound sources when creating their own music. Too often their experience is restricted to the use of electronic keyboards.
- There are a limited number of extra-curricular activities and take-up by students is low. Very few sixth-formers are engaged in additional music activities and none are involved in curriculum music.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- The senior leadership team's monitoring of provision focuses mainly on ensuring that there is consistency of procedures between staff, in areas such as lesson preparation and regular marking of students' books. However, action following self-evaluation is unsatisfactory because key issues identified over a year ago - for example, students' underachievement and improving the schemes of work - have not been tackled thoroughly enough by subject and school leaders. As a result, students continue to underachieve.
- Assessment information is gathered regularly. However, students' progress is judged by the quality of their written work, rather than evaluating the quality of their creativity and musical response.
- The current curriculum arrangements mean that only those Year 9 students who are judged more able in English and mathematics receive a programme of music lessons. The majority of Year 9 students have no such provision. Therefore, insufficient inconsideration is given to promoting equality of opportunity in music education.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- by March 2011, completing the revisions to the schemes of work for Key Stage 3 ensuring that:
 - the development of students' musical skills is planned systematically as they move through the school
 - singing is a regular feature in lessons throughout the key stage
 - sufficient opportunities are planned for students to use ICT to support their musical learning.
- removing underachievement by:
 - planning curriculum and extra-curricular activities which extend students' prior learning, capabilities and musical experiences
 - using audio recordings to help students assess their work and understand what they can do to make their music even better

- ensuring students know exactly what they are to learn in lessons rather than just the activities to be completed
- improving the leadership of music by:
 - ensuring that monitoring of the subject is sufficiently rigorous and impacts positively on students' progress and attainment
 - making certain that current inequalities of provision are eradicated and that all students have equal access to music education.

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