

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr R Glasby
Headteacher
Hassenbrook Technology College
Hassenbrook Road
Stanford-Le-Hope
Essex
SS17 0NS

Dear Mr Glasby

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 January 2011 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; observation of three class lessons, including one joint observation with a senior leader, and rehearsals for the school musical production; and short visits to two instrumental lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Standards are low in all aspects of musical learning. Singing, in class and in extra-curricular activities, is lacklustre with insecure intonation and poor diction. The heavy focus on written work in Key Stage 3 lessons means that students' aural awareness is underdeveloped, as is the quality of their creative responses through improvising and composing work.
- The proportion of students taking a music course in Key Stage 4 is low. Eight students took GCSE music in 2010, the first GCSE cohort for three years. Standards achieved by these students were well below the national average, although their progress in music was similar to that made in their other GCSE subjects. No current Year 11 students study music. Nine

students are taking the GCSE course in Year 10; scrutiny of their coursework files revealed a preponderance of written and theory work, with much less development of aural analysis and composing skills.

- The numbers of students benefiting from additional instrumental or vocal tuition is low and has declined year-on-year since 2005. Similarly, very small numbers participate in extra-curricular music activities.
- The low standards in Key Stage 3, poor take-up of GCSE music, and low levels of participation in additional tuition or extra-curricular music represent inadequate progress given students' abilities and prior musical experiences when they join the school.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- While lessons are planned with clear learning objectives, too often these objectives are concerned with the activities to be completed rather than the musical quality to be achieved. Very little use is made of musical modelling and demonstration in lessons with much more use of verbal descriptions and explanations. Sometimes, these verbal explanations are too simplistic or confused. Similarly, much more emphasis is placed on the quality of students' spoken and written responses – including notation – than is placed on their musical contributions. For example, while written work is marked diligently, the quality of students' singing is not challenged. Praise is injudicious; errors of intonation and diction are left uncorrected.
- No differences exist in the work set for students of different abilities or interests. Consequently, the most able students are not challenged and neither are those with special educational needs and/or disabilities given the support they require, even though these students are identified in lesson plans.
- Some video and audio recordings are made of practical tasks, but these are not used regularly or methodically to help students understand how to improve the musical quality of their work.
- As a consequence of this weak teaching, behaviour in Key Stage 3 lessons often deteriorates. Low-level talking, off-task disruption and non-participation are either ineffectively challenged or ignored.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- The schemes of work for Key Stages 3 and 4, which are currently undergoing revision, are incomplete. Where units of work are organised, planning files consist largely of collected worksheets and administrative materials. Some detailed plans are in place for individual topics, but these are taken directly from commercial publications and have not been adapted to reflect the school's context. It is unclear how the students' musical understanding is to develop as they journey through the school.

- The main music room is spacious and generally well-ordered. A reasonable collection of classroom instruments, including resources for teaching world music, is provided but provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is insufficient. Students in Key Stage 3 do not use ICT for music work, meaning that statutory requirements are not met. The very limited use of ICT made by GCSE students puts them at a distinct disadvantage, particularly for composing work.
- The range of extra-curricular activities is very limited. The glee club and the musical production are enjoyed by a small but enthusiastic number of students; rock musicians are also able to play in the 'Gig Nights' and make regular use of the practice rooms at lunchtimes. However, there are no other regular extra-curricular groups.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- Self-evaluation identified some shortcomings in provision but underestimated the extent of the problems and the impact on standards achieved by students. While the joint lesson observation undertaken resulted in an agreed judgement about the quality of teaching and learning, other observations of music lessons have been overgenerous in their judgements.
- The head of department has taken part in training for the national primary singing strategy, but has not benefitted from any other professional development opportunities, such as the Key Stage 3 music strategy. Links with other local secondary schools are at an early stage of development, and have not yet improved the quality of provision.
- Some partnership working with professional music groups has taken place; for example, Year 7 students have the opportunity to attend a schools' performance by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the standards in music by:
 - ensuring that teaching is driven by musical modelling and demonstration, leading to students' practical musical participation
 - ensuring that the level of challenge and expectation for the musical quality of students' work is high
 - ensuring that the tasks set and support given are appropriate to students of all abilities and interests
- raising students' achievements in music by:
 - before September 2011, re-organising the curriculum plans and resources to show how students' musical understanding should develop through Key Stages 3 and 4

- by September 2011, providing equipment and teaching resources for ICT so that all statutory requirements are met in Key Stage 3 and so that GCSE students have good, regular access to ICT, particularly for their composing work
 - increasing the proportions of students participating in additional instrumental tuition and extra-curricular music activities
- strengthening the leadership and management of music by:
- monitoring more thoroughly the quality of curriculum planning and teaching, with particular emphasis on the musical quality of students' learning and participation
 - facilitating opportunities for the head of department to work in partnership with other local schools to share ideas and resources, and to improve understanding of current issues in 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

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector