

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr V Maher  
Headteacher  
Madeley Academy  
Castlefields Way  
Madeley  
Telford  
TF7 5FB

Dear Mr Maher

### **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 1 and 2 February 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 five class lessons, and rehearsals of the samba band and for the school musical production.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. Good teaching and good leadership and management suggest that there is good capacity for further improvement. However, remaining issues in curriculum planning and unevenness in access, because of the way that the academy's curriculum is organised, are preventing students from making better than satisfactory progress.

#### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Given their prior experiences of music and general prior attainment, students make broadly satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3. Nevertheless, standards remain below expectations. Development of melodic and rhythmic understanding is satisfactory, as is students' capacity for creating and developing rhythmic ideas. Students have reasonable knowledge of a suitably broad range of musical styles but the

depth of their musical understanding and the pace of their progress are limited by the Key Stage 3 curriculum organisation.

- The proportion of Key Stage 4 students studying for an accredited course involving music is above average. Results data suggest that students achieve very well in the BTEC First Certificate or Diploma courses, compared with their achievement in other subjects. They make better progress in the written aspects than they do in the development of their musical understanding through, for example, their performance work. Overall, students' musical development in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory.
- The number of students benefiting from additional instrumental or vocal tuition is satisfactory, as are the numbers participating regularly in extra-curricular music activities. Students from all groups are included, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, although not all groups are represented equally.

### **Quality of teaching in music**

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Teachers are very good musicians and use their skills effectively to model good practice. Leadership of performance work is particularly good, with teachers paying close attention to inaccuracies and taking effective steps for improvement. The focus on practical music-making is good in lessons, and students are appreciative of the way in which tasks are organised and broken down, to help them learn and master new skills and musical ideas. Listening and written tasks are similarly well-structured but on some occasions, because of the way that some Key Stage 3 curriculum projects are organised, these are undertaken in advance of practical work and are not as effective in developing students' musical understanding.
- Regular video and audio recordings are made of practical tasks, and help students to understand how they might improve their work. Teachers' assessments are made regularly, although these are more often concerned with separate skills or knowledge than they are with students' holistic musical understanding.
- Information and communication technology is used very well to engage students of all abilities, although sometimes, the use of computers is greater for students' verbal and theoretical learning, rather than using it to develop students' musicality.

### **Quality of the curriculum in music**

The quality of the curriculum in music is broadly satisfactory.

- In common with other subjects, the Key Stage 3 music curriculum programme is completed in Years 7 and 8. The great majority of students receive an hour and a half of class music every week during these years. However, those identified as requiring additional support with literacy do not receive any music lessons in Year 7; instead, they have three hours of music each week in Year 8. While this is sufficient for all students to

complete a satisfactorily broad programme of study, these arrangements mean that students' musical development over time is restricted and this is a key reason why they do not make better than satisfactory progress.

- The scheme of work for Key Stage 3 is currently undergoing revision. All units are well-resourced and contain an appropriate range of musical styles, genres and traditions. New units are suitably focused on the ongoing development of students' musical understanding. However, some of the older units have as much focus on written and listening work as they do on practical music-making. A clear plan is in place to complete rewriting of the remaining units and organise all projects into an order which gives a greater sense of musical progression. However, at present, curriculum planning in Key Stage 3 is only satisfactory.
- The BTEC course is popular and is leading to a greater number of students taking a qualification involving music. Planning of this course is good, including meticulous personalised planning for individual students' module choices.
- A reasonable range of additional instrumental lessons and a growing selection of ensemble activities is available, including the choir, samba band, and the annual musical theatre production.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in music**

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

- After a year of reduced staffing, the department returned to full strength in September 2010 and a strong team is now in place. The department is well resourced and accommodated, with a clear sense of purpose and good musical direction. Self-evaluation, while over-generous in some judgements, rightly recognises that improvements in teaching and the leadership of music have yet to impact fully on students' achievement.
- The number of students participating in additional musical activities has grown in recent years; good efforts have been made to increase these opportunities including helping with the cost of additional tuition for students in financial need.
- The school is aware of initiatives in primary music education, including the 'Wider Opportunities' initiative, and recognises that more consideration should be given to how the academy builds on this work. This includes the organisation of group music tuition, rather than the individual lessons that currently operate. There is reasonable awareness of other contemporary developments in music education, although teachers' professional development has been mainly concerned with developing Key Stage 4 examination courses.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- raising the standards in Key Stage 3, so that they are in line with national expectations, by:

- ensuring that sufficiently regular opportunities are available for all students to practise skills and develop their musical understanding throughout Years 7 and 8
  - completing the curriculum revisions and organisation, ensuring that there is a clear sense of musical progression as students move through the school
- raising students' achievements in music across the school by:
- further increasing the number of students benefiting from additional instrumental and vocal tuition, including through small-group lessons
  - exploring ways to encourage the equal participation of students from all groups, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- further improving the teaching of music by taking a broader view of students' musical development when assessing their progress, rather than making judgements on individual skills.

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.

Yours sincerely

**Mark Phillips**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**