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Mrs J Wilson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Wilson

### **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 20 and 21 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, students, a governor, the school improvement partner and three of the school's creative partners; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of five class lessons, and short visits to instrumental enrichment lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. Following difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, the school's senior management put in place an alternative approach to curriculum music provision in Key Stage 3. This includes the use of external creative partners to provide five 'immersion days' in each of Years 7 and 8 as part of the 'Dreams and Risks = Education' (DARE) programme. Other musical experiences are planned within performing arts lessons that have drama or dance as a main focus. However, while it is positive that the school has built good relationships with the creative partners, including the local authority music school, this arrangement is not enough to prevent the inadequate development of students' musical skills, knowledge and understanding. Other aspects of music work are underdeveloped, and there are no students in Key Stages 4 or the sixth form currently studying for curriculum music examinations.

### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Standards in playing instruments are low throughout the school. Those receiving additional instrumental tuition are still at the early stages of learning. Students enjoy opportunities to play instruments in Key Stage 3 lessons but, as their lessons are spaced so far apart, they do not develop adequate technical mastery of performance skills. Standards of singing are low; there is no planned progression of vocal work through Key Stage 3. The organisation of the Key Stage 3 curriculum means that coverage of key concepts, styles, traditions, and genres is superficial and students do not consolidate their musical understanding.
- No student has taken GCSE music since 2008. A mixed-age GCSE class is offered outside the normal school timetable, but take-up is low and there are no students in Years 10 and 11 opting to take the examination. There are no students studying for examination courses in the sixth form.
- The numbers of students benefiting from additional instrumental or vocal tuition are small. Similarly, small numbers participate in the limited range of extra-curricular activities. Although the school reports that some sixth form students offer informal support to younger students, there are no sixth form students registered as participating in additional music tuition or extra-curricular music activities.
- Notwithstanding the overall below-average ability of students when they join Year 7, the low standards in Key Stage 3, absence of students studying music in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, and poor levels of participation in additional tuition or extra-curricular music represent inadequate progress across the school.

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

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Performing Arts lessons with a musical element are planned professionally and led confidently in a way that engenders inclusive participation and good working relationships. However, the level of musical expectation and challenge in these lessons is far too low. The subject-specific language, and the nature of the tasks set, is that found typically in primary education. Far too much time is spent discussing, and not enough time is spent modelling and developing musical responses.
- The DARE sessions benefit from being led by well-qualified, experienced musicians. However, planning of these days does not show an adequate depth of musical understanding required of students, or the way in which tasks should be sequenced to link together different aspects of musical learning. For example, in one lesson, students heard a series of extracts from different world music traditions, but there was insufficient time to explore the musical structures that were characteristic of each style. Similarly, a Year 8 music day featured activities about music notation, scales, learning to use information and communication technology (ICT) for arranging pre-composed riffs, and the blues – but these activities were not linked or developed in appropriate depth.

- Assessment records are kept, but the assessment methods used to come to the levels awarded are not robust. In some cases, they are spurious. For example, in one lesson seen, students were asked to mark each group's work out of 10 without any meaningful reference to the musical reasons why the work was less or more successful.

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

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- There are two reasons why the planning of the Key Stage 3 curriculum arrangement is inadequate, and consequently students' musical learning is superficial. Firstly, there is not enough time in total across each year for all curriculum requirements to be covered in sufficient breadth or depth, and music sessions are spaced too far apart. Secondly, while individual activities are mapped against the National Curriculum programme of study to suggest that, overall, all requirements are met and all content is covered, there is no vision of how key concepts and skills are to be developed over the whole key stage.
- Current accommodation for music is entirely unsuitable, although a new music suite is nearing completion as part of the major rebuilding project. There is a reasonable range of classroom instruments, including provision for ICT as part of the media suite.
- All additional instrumental and vocal tuition takes place at the same time, after school on Friday. This arrangement has engendered a good social atmosphere and positive ethos amongst the participating students but the musical benefits are more limited because the restricted accommodation means that the environment for these lessons is too noisy. It is, however, to the school's credit that no charge is made for this tuition.
- The range of extra-curricular music activities is very limited. There are two small singing groups, but no regular opportunities for students to play instruments in ensembles.

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

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

- While recognising the efforts made by senior management to provide some musical opportunities, there is a distinct absence of musical leadership that impacts on the quality of teaching and the curriculum, and ultimately on students' musical achievements. While the visiting teachers who are responsible for the GCSE class, the DARE and Performing Arts sessions, and the Friday afternoon additional tuition programme are diligent and organised, there is no vision for the overall programme or direction of music in the school.
- Similarly, senior managers have willingly taken on responsibility for overseeing individual activities but there is insufficient musical expertise within the school's leadership to judge the effectiveness of music provision accurately. Self-evaluation, while recognising difficulties in accommodation

and staffing, and planning for future improvements including the appointment of a subject leader, is overgenerous in its judgements.

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

- by May 2011, appointing a subject leader for music, with a clear brief and full support to raise achievement by
  - organising the planning and teaching of the Key Stage 3 curriculum in a way that coordinates and promotes students' musical skills, knowledge, and understanding as they progress from Year 7 to 9
  - promoting and establishing examination courses in Key Stage 4 and, in due course, the sixth form
  - promoting and raising participation in additional instrumental and vocal tuition, and in extra-curricular music activities
  
- by September 2011, ensuring that enough time and sufficiently regular opportunities are scheduled throughout Key Stage 3 to enable curriculum requirements to be covered in appropriate breadth and depth, and that students are able to consolidate their learning through regular practice and experience of music.

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**