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Mrs E Wilkes
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Wilkes

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 7 and 8 March 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 learners; scrutiny of relevant documentation; students' work; and observation of three lessons and other activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- Examination results at GCSE and scrutiny of the work of students, currently in Year 11, show attainment in Year 11 is above average. This represents good achievement. Over the past three years, the proportion of students opting for music in Key Stage 4 has been above average. Many students are accomplished and confident when performing on instruments. They discuss their own compositions in a mature way, explaining the techniques and structural elements that they have used.
- Students are self-motivated and appreciate the range of musical opportunities open to them. Instrumentalists show strong commitment in rehearsals, often contributing their own ideas as to how their performances can be improved musically.

- Achievement is good during Key Stage 3 although singing and performing are generally stronger than composing. Singing receives appropriate emphasis in lessons and is complemented by a good range of vocal ensembles and opportunities. Students sing in two or three parts, holding their individual lines well and many students choose to use their voices in their group performances and compositions.
- The proportion of students participating in additional instrumental or vocal lessons is satisfactory overall with take-up strongest in Years 7 and 8. Participation declines during Years 10 and 11, although some students in these years continue to learn instruments privately or simply play for pleasure.
- The overall proportion of students participating in lunchtime and after-school activities is good. However, more girls participate than boys, and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are not as involved as the more able students.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- All lessons observed involved practical music activities and planning indicates this is almost always the case. Through singing, playing instruments or composing their own ideas, students develop their musical understanding successfully. Relevant notation is used to support students' learning and more demanding parts are available for students when appropriate. Although this happens in practice, the challenge and expectations for the more able singers and instrumentalists are not sufficiently explicit in the department's plans.
- Students are clear about their learning, and the skills and knowledge they are developing. They respond well in lessons, especially when undertaking practical tasks. Questioning strategies are effective. Modelling is also used well by the teacher, for example to illustrate keyboard techniques with good use made of technology to project the teacher's keyboard on to the screen. The only drawback to this strategy is the lack of suitable blinds in the room which affects clear view of the screen on sunny days.
- Recordings are used frequently for students to listen to their work and to review their achievements. These are, nevertheless, used more for final performances than to enable students to listen critically to work in progress, to review how this might be modified and improved.
- Suitable arrangements are in place to assess students' progress on a termly basis and students are aware of the levels at which they are working. At Key Stage 4, students have a good grasp of the examination criteria and they receive effective feedback on their composing and performing to help them improve further.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- A good outline plan for the GCSE curriculum is in place, encompassing all required elements of the examination. The planned curriculum at Key Stage 3 includes a suitable range of activities, rooted in practical activity and supported by appropriate use of information and communication technology. Singing and performing on instruments, mainly keyboards, are strong aspects in the curriculum but creating musical ideas is not quite as well promoted.
- The Year 9 curriculum has been improved over recent years. Students now work more independently on group compositions and performances and draw upon their own instrumental skills more widely. This strategy has had a beneficial effect on students' achievement and enjoyment of music. Opportunities for younger students to work in this way are more limited.
- A good range of additional activities enhances students' experiences and promotes enjoyment of music. Students appreciate the varied programme of concerts, workshops and trips, including foreign tours. Valuable opportunities are provided each week for students to hear live music during assemblies, when students perform to one another.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is good.

- The subject leader has an accurate view of key strengths and priorities for development and has a clear vision for the subject. Priorities over recent years have been well focused and led to stronger partnerships with other schools, including the primary schools, and broader curriculum opportunities for students. Music has a strong profile in the school. The subject leader has been supported well by senior leaders and has benefited from a suitable programme of professional development.
- The school organises its own programme of instrumental and vocal tuition. Although this provision is monitored informally, there is no mechanism for more formal monitoring and evaluation by the subject leader to check the effectiveness of this provision.
- Limited numbers of pupils enter the school having benefited from the 'Wider Opportunities' instrumental teaching programme in their primary schools. The subject leader has countered this by offering workshops and funding tuition and loan of instruments for feeder primary schools. This has helped to raise the profile of instrumental and vocal tuition and is already showing benefits with increased take-up in Years 7 and 8.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- broadening the opportunities for group composition work in Key Stage 3 and for students who play instruments to use these in class lessons
- identifying in Key Stage 3 planning what will be expected of the more able and/or experienced musicians to enable them to make best use of their skills and understanding

- establishing a system for monitoring the quality of the instrumental and vocal tuition to identify strengths that could be disseminated more widely and aspects that could be improved further.

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

Margaret Dickinson
Her Majesty's Inspector