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Mr R Baker  
Acting Operational Headmaster  
Dorothy Stringer High School  
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Brighton  
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Dear Mr Baker

### **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 9 and 10 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; analysis of students' work including video recordings of performances and rehearsals; and observation of seven lessons and an extra-curricular activity.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is good.

- Students make good progress in relation to their broadly average starting points and, by the end of Key Stage 3, standards are above average. The large numbers of students studying music in Key Stage 4 also make good progress. Standards by the end of Year 11 are consistently above average and often high. Students show good understanding of music from different cultures, sing and play instruments well and, particularly in Key Stage 4, create imaginative and expressive compositions.
- Large numbers of students receive instrumental or vocal tuition, with a satisfactory proportion taking part in extra-curricular activities, where they achieve well. Particularly high standards are attained in the mixed-voice

contemporary a capella choir, where part-singing is accurate, expressive and vibrant. The school recognises, however, that more students, including those with different musical interests and experiences, could be involved in extra-curricular activities.

- Students engage positively in lessons and in additional activities, and their personal development through music is good. They are confident, well behaved, and cooperate well with each other and their teachers. Music prefects play an important part in helping to manage and organise ensembles and concerts.

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

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Secure working relationships provide a good basis for effective learning. Most lessons have a clear focus for learning and are based on an aural and practical approach where students learn through first-hand involvement in music making. In a minority of cases, planning does not identify precisely enough the learning that is intended and sometimes verbal explanations, or the inappropriate use of notation, limit students' progress.
- Information and communication technology is often used well, especially to support students' work in composing, although in a few cases it is used too early in the creative process. Video and audio recordings of students' work are used very effectively to help them to understand how to improve their work.
- Ongoing assessment and feedback in lessons also contribute well to developing students' understanding of how to improve their work. The link between assessment and National Curriculum levels, however, does not always place sufficient emphasis on the key learning outlined in the first sentence of each level description.

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

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities for students of different experiences and aptitudes to be involved in music. The scheme of work for Key Stage 3, which includes a good range of musical styles and cultures, is currently being developed in response to local and national initiatives. For example, the introduction of regular singing lessons in Year 7 is having a positive impact on students' achievements. The subject leader recognises the importance of developing this provision throughout Key Stage 3.
- The school provides a very good range of instrumental and vocal lessons and a good range of extra-curricular activities, some of which are organised by students. While some of these activities provide opportunities

for students who do not receive specialist instrumental or vocal tuition, there is scope to broaden the range further to involve other students.

- The school's links with the local authority music service benefit many students through specialist tuition and opportunities to take part in ensemble activities within and beyond the school. Links with community groups provide worthwhile opportunities to perform outside the school while partnerships with professional musicians and organisations, including Glyndebourne, further enhance opportunities and experiences for students.

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

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

- The school's evaluation of the effectiveness of music has accurately identified strengths and areas for development. For example, while good progress has been made in developing the curriculum in Key Stage 3, the department recognises that further developments are required and is taking action to implement these. The department is also focusing on raising standards further in Key Stage 4, while maintaining and increasing the large numbers studying music.
- The school's vision for music is based around the importance of enabling all students to access music. Arrangements both within and beyond lessons provide well for different groups of students, although the school recognises that some further opportunities could be provided to broaden the range of those involved in extra-curricular activities.
- The school's good capacity for sustained improvement is seen, for example, in the actions taken to broaden the curriculum including enhancing the provision for high-quality singing.

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

- building on existing effective practice by ensuring that all lessons consistently:
  - identify simply and precisely what students are expected to learn
  - are practical and aurally based
  - link assessments more directly to the key learning identified in National Curriculum level descriptions
- completing the revision of the scheme of work for Key Stage 3 including through developing and extending the provision for singing
- extending the range of extra-curricular activities to involve students with different musical interests and abilities.

I hope 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

**David Williams**  
**Additional Inspector**