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Mrs S Catlow-Hawkins  
Headteacher  
The Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School  
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Dear Mrs Catlow-Hawkins

### **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 22 and 23 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 students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of six class lessons (including two joint observations) and two instrumental lessons; and rehearsals of the chamber choir, brass group, intermediate strings, and the koto group.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

#### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is good.

- For the past three years, the number of students taking a curriculum course in music has been above average. Standards in GCSE music have also been above average and this is confirmed by the scrutiny of current Year 11 students' work. Other courses offered in Key Stage 4, including BTEC National Certificate and NCFE Music Technology, have enabled a greater range of students to achieve well in music. However, current Year 10 students have not benefited from this diverse provision and their progress is only just satisfactory.

- In Key Stage 3, students make good progress to reach firmly average standards in all aspects of musical learning, including in singing which is a particular strength of the school. The provision and success of vocal training and performance groups for both boys and girls are commendable. Students develop a positive, open attitude to music from different traditions but the depth of their cultural awareness and understanding is more limited. For example, while they show secure understanding of the rhythmic, melodic and harmonic features of calypso music, they are less confident about the provenance and purpose of the music and how these features influence the musical style.
- A good proportion of students from all year groups receive additional instrumental or vocal tuition in school, with more learning privately out of school. Numbers participating in extra-curricular music activities are also good. Standards in these activities are above average. The inclusion and development of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in all aspects of music, including in curriculum lessons and in extra-curricular activities, are outstanding.

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

The quality of teaching in music is good overall.

- Students benefit from the musical expertise of a large and diverse team of classroom and instrumental teachers. Ensemble performance activities are led well and are effective in raising students' musical standards, enjoyment, and confidence.
- Some classroom teaching is outstanding. For example, in one lesson observed, Year 8 students learnt how to improvise a blues melody through carefully structured fast-paced activities that integrated focused listening to a Muddy Waters' song, the development of their rhythmic skills through call and response exercises, and the improvement of their keyboard performance skills. The teacher's direction was concise and apposite, and used a seamless amalgam of musical demonstration and spoken explanation.
- However, not all classroom teaching is of this high quality. In some lessons, too much time is spent on wordy teacher-dominated presentations and explanations. Consequently, students remain passive for too long and this slows their musical development.
- Both music rooms have large computer suites. While these are often used extremely well – for example, in the Year 7 learning support class, where students were helped to produce a three-part arrangement of a song through the use of multi-track recording – on some occasions, the computers are used injudiciously when it would be more effective for students to compose and perform using acoustic instruments.

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

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Appropriate time is given to the Key Stage 3 curriculum, which is planned in great detail and covers a suitably broad range of musical styles, traditions and genres. Key Stage 4 courses are also planned well but it is concerning that, because of whole-school curriculum structures and a fall in the number of students applying to study music, the decision was made to place all current Year 10 on the BTEC course. Inspection evidence showed that while the composing aspects of their learning are appropriately rigorous and challenging, other activities are less demanding or valuable for the students who wish to continue studying music at A level. The school is right, therefore, to be reconsidering this decision for the current Year 9 cohort.
- The class teaching rooms are well ordered and well resourced. There are a good number of practice rooms for individual and small-group tuition, but these are poorly furnished and inadequately soundproofed. Rehearsal space for large ensembles is also restricted because of poor access or because of joint access with other users.
- The school has an excellent long-term partnership with the Herefordshire Music Service, and makes greater use of this service than any other school in the local authority. There are also good links with other local musicians and arts organisations, and all this helps to provide a wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular music groups together with a very good range of instrumental and vocal tuition. Vocal performance projects have been undertaken with feeder primary schools, but there are no links to build on the curriculum music that students experience in Key Stage 2.

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

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

- Strong musical leadership helps to ensure good outcomes for students including good participation rates. The department is generally well managed and organised on a day-to-day basis.
- There is a sound understanding of current issues in music education, and the head of department supports the work of the local initial teacher training consortium.
- The music department's numerous strengths are identified accurately and greatly celebrated by the school. However, the overall self-evaluation, including by line managers, is overgenerous and does not give rigorous enough consideration to what needs to be improved. This is particularly the case with evaluating and improving the quality of class teaching so that it is consistently good and outstanding.

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

- securing good curriculum provision by:

- reintroducing the GCSE music course to meet the needs of the more academic students and those who may progress to the A-level course
  - refreshing the fabric of the practice rooms, including ensuring that there is adequate soundproofing
  - making links between the Key Stage 3 curriculum and students' prior musical experiences in Key Stage 2
- ensuring that curriculum teaching is consistently good and outstanding by:
- ensuring that all lessons have, at their heart, a holistic approach to developing students' musical understanding that is enabled by teachers' musical modelling and explanation rather than dominated by the teachers' verbal instruction
  - ensuring that computers are always used appropriately to develop students' musical understanding, and that the students' instrumental and ensemble skills continue to be developed regularly in curriculum lessons
- improving monitoring and evaluation by challenging provision and outcomes more rigorously, particularly through lesson observations and more effective line management.

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**