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Mr J Colquhoun
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Colquhoun

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during our 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 and recordings of students' work and school performance; observation of eight lessons, including instrumental teaching and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- The proportion of students who have vocal or instrumental lessons is well above that found nationally. Students' involvement in the wide range of music clubs, productions and other activities is also good overall. Boys are not as well represented in some groups, particularly the vocal ensembles.
- Students who receive tuition on instruments or voice apply their skills and knowledge well in music lessons. For many, music is an important part of their lives and contributes strongly to their wider personal and social development. Students' mature attitudes and commitment to music are strong factors in their good achievement, most notably in Key Stage 4.

- At Key Stage 3, attainment is above average. Attainment at Key Stage 4 is well above average with the proportion attaining A* to C grades significantly higher than that found nationally. The proportion opting for music is around twice the national average. There is a balanced take-up between boys and girls.
- Small numbers take A-level music or music technology and not all have taken GCSE music beforehand. Over three years, attainment in the sixth form has been below average in both subjects. Achievement is satisfactory overall. Provision is rightly being reviewed as part of this year's action plan for the department.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Music lessons routinely involve practical activity. Keyboards and computers are frequently used to support learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Lessons are well planned and organised, and well resourced. Instrumental and vocal teachers provide good support for many students with the performing aspects of the GCSE and A-level examinations.
- Students are clear about the learning focus of lessons and what is required of them. The emphasis is good on building students' knowledge of musical terminology, usually linked appropriately to the practical context. The quality of advice and guidance for students taking GCSE has strengthened this year. Students appreciate the support they now receive.
- Teachers have a consistent approach to assessing students' learning in lessons. This has most impact when the teacher picks up on any weaknesses or misunderstanding and follows this up with further explanation or clarification. Teachers sometimes miss valuable opportunities to model themselves, as musicians.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The strength of the curriculum is in the quality and range of the extra-curricular activities (known as the '3-2-5' programme), the performance opportunities, and ensemble work. Students are offered a rich variety of experiences and some particularly memorable occasions, such as large-scale performances and the regular choral exchange with a school in Japan.
- The school has a strong, established partnership with Wiltshire Music Centre, which provides spacious teaching rooms and a professional performance venue. Successful links have been built up with instrumental and vocal teachers and professional performers. All Year 7 students take part annually in an opera project with a professional orchestra.
- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is rightly under review and in the process of being updated to provide better integration of composing, performing,

listening and appraising. The new units of work provide greater coherence in developing students' musical knowledge and understanding within a musical context. The revised plans are not yet complete and, as it stands, the curriculum does not show a clear progression in how skills and knowledge are developed, particularly in relation to composing.

- Curriculum plans are not sufficiently explicit about how the most able instrumentalists will be catered for or challenged. This leads to some advanced instrumentalists making slower progress in lessons.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is good.

- Music has a strong profile in the school. Teachers from the department and the instrumental and vocal teaching team make a strong contribution to the '3-2-5' programme, performances and shows.
- The head of music has a good knowledge of the strengths in the department's work and has drawn up a well-focused, appropriate action plan. She has a strong vision and high expectations for the subject, informed by a good understanding of current developments in music.
- Very good use is made of the facilities available through the Wiltshire Music Centre which provides good teaching spaces and gives students valuable opportunities to perform in a professional venue.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- expanding opportunities for boys to participate in '3-2-5' activities where they are not currently well represented, particularly in vocal ensembles
- improving the curriculum plans in Key Stage 3 to promote better progression in skills, particularly composing, and ensuring that plans are more explicit about what will be expected of the most able musicians
- improving provision in the sixth form to raise standards and improve achievement, particularly in music technology.

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