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Mr D Higgs
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Higgs

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 25 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; and observation of a music lesson, a performing arts lesson, an instrumental session and a band rehearsal.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. A fall in student numbers in recent years has necessitated a reduction in staff, through compulsory as well as voluntary redundancy, and a restructuring of the curriculum and the management of the school. As part of the school's recovery plan, the local authority has agreed to maintain a decreasing deficit budget over a period of three years. The school is making progress with its recovery plan. However, in the process, it has lost its only music specialist, who took up a post elsewhere and could not be replaced under the terms of the recovery plan, and so no longer provides students with their entitlement to music in Key Stage 3. Therefore, as you recognise, the school is not fulfilling requirements in relation to the curriculum.

Achievement in music

- For most students studying music in Year 11, attainment is below what could be expected at this stage in the GCSE course. In the lesson seen, their composition work lacked shape and an insecure grasp of musical

conventions meant that those who tried to notate their work were unable to do so accurately. Few performed with confidence. Progress in the lesson and over time was limited. However, in the band rehearsal, some of these same students sang and played with great confidence, adapting their performance to a range of styles. Their compositions also showed sensitivity and a good command of pop, rock and other idioms.

- Students have the opportunity to take part in a number of extra-curricular activities, including regular pop events. A group from the school recently won the regional Battle of the Bands competition which included a recording contract.
- Those who take part in the activities offered evidently enjoy their experiences and speak with enthusiasm about them. However, participation across the school is limited.

Quality of teaching in music

- The opportunities to observe music teaching were limited. In the Year 11 lesson seen, the teacher established very good relationships with the students who worked with consistent concentration. The lesson would have benefited from greater clarity of purpose and more opportunities for students to perform and to evaluate each other's work. Better use could also have been made of the accommodation so that students could work in groups in a studio environment.
- The performing arts lesson was delivered with great verve and the teacher made good use of his knowledge and expertise in drama. However, the small musical element, focusing on producing a rap interpretation of a scene from Shakespeare, did not provide enough opportunities to develop the students' musical skills and understanding.

Quality of the curriculum in music

- In Key Stage 3, no music is being taught at present. It is intended that students in Years 7, 8 and 9 will follow a module in music in the summer term. However, these modules will be restricted to aspects of vocal work and will not be sufficient to meet National Curriculum requirements.
- In Key Stage 4, music is limited to the Year 11 students who are completing their GCSE course. They receive two lessons a week from a member of the local authority's music service and have weekly access to the music technology studio at a local performing arts college.
- In addition, students have access to instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities which focus particularly on band and vocal work.
- In part compensation for the lack of music in Key Stage 3, there are plans to participate in the 'Musical Futures' programme, in collaboration with the local authority. However, these are at a very early stage of development.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

- You and your senior management accept that provision does not allow students in Key Stage 3 to receive their entitlement in music. You have explored a number of ways of compensating in part for this but the plans have been affected by a number of factors, including staff absence.
- Through partnership with the local authority and other providers, you have ensured that Year 11 students are able to complete their GCSE courses. However, monitoring and evaluation of the quality of provision in Key Stage 4 have been limited.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- the need to ensure, as a matter of urgency, that all students in Key Stage 3 receive their entitlement to National Curriculum music.

In the light of this, the governing body should ensure that:

- from September 2011, all students in Key Stage 3 follow a programme of musical study which meets the full requirements of the National Curriculum
- the school has musically qualified teaching staff in place to teach that curriculum to the expected standard
- the quality of the music curriculum is monitored regularly and reviewed formally by the end of the summer term 2012.

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

Aelwyn Pugh
Her Majesty's Inspector