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Ms L Calderback
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Calderback

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 24 and 25 June 2010 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 selected students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observations of six class lessons, instrumental lessons and a choir rehearsal.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Standards in GCSE examinations, after a dip in 2008, were well above average in 2009. An above average proportion of students study music in Key Stage 4 and their progress is good. Students demonstrate confident use of varied musical styles in their compositions, producing pieces that are well structured, have complex rhythmic patterns and reflect well the instruments for which they are written.
- By the end of Year 9, standards are broadly average in most parts of music learning with singing being a weaker aspect. The school recognises that it has limited information of students' attainment before they join in Year 7. Nevertheless, lesson observations and recordings of students' work indicate that they make broadly satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3.

- A similar number of boys and girls receive instrumental lessons. However, three times as many girls compared with boys are involved in extra-curricular activities. Although students from most ability and ethnic groups are represented, there are few who have special needs and/or disabilities or are entitled to free school meals. Many older students are confident performers and several spoke eloquently of how music is an important part of their lives. They welcome and enjoy the opportunities to play in the different ensembles organised by the staff.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Lessons are planned carefully and always identify what students are to learn and how activities will be organised. Teachers bring different musical skills and expertise to lessons and use them successfully when modelling and supporting students' learning in the classroom. Students respond musically to their teacher's questions, demonstrating clearly their understanding - for example of a particular musical style.
- In most cases, teachers use ongoing assessment very well to identify areas for improvement and demonstrate how the quality of music-making could be improved. However, this is not yet consistent across all classes.
- Students are encouraged to perform to their peers and learn from their mistakes. Mostly they are confident users of information and communication technology (ICT), including using computers to record and listen to their work.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The curriculum includes a good range of musical styles and genres with a variety of musical activities. However, the school recognises that singing is not a regular feature in lessons. Following an audit of students' musical skills and interests before the inspection, teachers are also aware that they have a limited knowledge of which students are involved in music activities out of school. As a result, not all students' musical interests are considered when planning lessons, especially at Key Stage 3.
- Class lessons are enhanced successfully through the good variety of ensembles and the workshops with professional musicians, both within school and at national venues. However, these workshops are only available currently to more able students and to some of those who study music at Key Stage 4. Nevertheless, students welcome taking part in these events and very much look forward to the European music tours.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- Despite music accommodation being housed in different parts of the school, the music staff display a strong sense of unity and work well as a team. Students are very appreciative of the additional help out of lesson time provided by their teachers. They summed up their feelings with the words, 'they really do go the extra mile for us'.
- The provision is monitored regularly to ensure that procedures are consistent between staff and that all are providing a similar musical experience for the students. The departmental action plan and monitoring enable lessons to be planned uniformly and also support some aspects of teaching. Assessment data are collected regularly. However, the data are not interrogated sufficiently thoroughly and linked with the regular monitoring so that leaders can demonstrate a measurable impact on students' progress.
- Teachers have a broad awareness of national issues in music education but, as yet, have not used this information to inform future developments. They do recognise, however, that links with primary schools, for example, are underdeveloped.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that singing is a regular part of music learning and engaging all groups of students, especially boys, in extra-curricular activities
- using the information about students' outside musical interests and previous music learning to provide challenging musical activities which meet their needs appropriately
- using information from monitoring activities to inform and plan future developments, ensuring that they have a measurable impact on students' achievements.

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 sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector