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Mrs M Hughes
Acting Headteacher
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Compton Road West
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Dear Mrs Hughes

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit with Adrian Guy HMI on 19 and 20 September 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; a meeting with the head of Wolverhampton Music School; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of four class lessons, one instrumental lesson, and a tutorial led by 'Zip Rock'.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Standards in Key Stage 3 are broadly average. There are strengths in playing instruments and in understanding a diverse range of musical styles and traditions, but equally there are weaknesses in the development of singing and in using information and communication technology (ICT) to create and manipulate musical sounds. Overall, Key Stage 3 students make satisfactory progress, given their prior abilities and experiences.
- GCSE music results have varied considerably in recent years. Standards have ranged from above average to below average. In 2011, the majority of students did not achieve their target grade. The school has correctly identified that difficulties with the listening paper are a key reason why

students do not achieve better. Work observed suggests that current Year 11 students are making satisfactory progress.

- In the sixth form, courses are taught as part of a consortium with two other local schools. Published results and work seen show that St Edmunds' A-level students are making satisfactory progress to reach broadly average standards. Although all students taking the BTEC level 3 Music Performance gained merits or distinctions in the 2011 examinations, the quality of music performance work observed was clearly, at best, only average against standards normally seen in sixth form work.
- Overall, the proportions of students benefiting from additional instrumental tuition and/or participating in extra-curricular music are satisfactory. Although all groups are represented, the involvement of numbers of students with special educational needs, in receipt of free school meals, or with English as an additional language, are disproportionately low. The school and Wolverhampton Music School recognise that more could be done to promote the engagement of these students.
- For those who do participate in additional activities such as the biennial European tour, music makes a good contribution to their personal development. The four-part choir enjoys a strong reputation in the local community and plays an important role in promoting the school's Catholic ethos.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Lessons are administered very well; students are left in no doubt about the tasks that they are expected to complete. Working relationships are good in all classes.
- Video and audio recordings are made regularly of students' work, and assessment records kept meticulously, although the latter are sometimes in unnecessary detail and do not recognise the inter-development of students' performing, composing and listening skills. This reflects teaching methods, particularly at GCSE, where activities are not linked together sufficiently.
- Teachers are knowledgeable and competent musicians. Some effective use is made of modelling to show students what is expected, but there is often too much verbal description and explanation by the teachers and not enough questioning of the students. This is the case in class lessons, instrumental tuition, and sessions led by visiting musicians.
- While all lessons include practical musical activity, the structure of these tasks is often too generalised or too vague. For example, while the listening logbooks for Key Stage 3 students are good in principle, the identical, generic questions that are set do not help students to recognise the stylistic differences between pieces.
- Limited account is taken of students' different learning needs or prior musical experiences, particularly in Key Stage 3 classes and sixth form

lessons. Too often, all students are set exactly the same tasks, whatever their need or background.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The time allocation and curriculum content for Key Stage 3 are sufficient to promote a satisfactory breadth and depth of coverage. However, the curriculum plan does not promote enough sense of musical progression as students move from Year 7 to 9, and in particular there is limited planning for the development of singing and ICT skills. Furthermore, setting arrangements in Year 9, which are based on ability in English, mean that some students are taught in groups of more than 30. This inhibits teaching and progress, particularly in a 50-minute lesson.
- Schemes of work in Key Stage 4 and 5 are briefer, with single-sheet overviews complemented by documents from the examination boards. While administrative plans and processes are extremely thorough, these are not the same as educational plans. The GCSE, BTEC and A-level courses would all benefit from more thorough and integrated planning of students' learning, particularly in the sixth form where courses are delivered in partnership with two other schools.
- Accommodation remains extremely cramped. Although the main classrooms are kept in good order, other areas of the department are cluttered and do not promote good learning.
- While the partnership with 'Zip Rock' provides students with regular engagement with professional musicians, including through an annual GCSE project that is funded by Wolverhampton Music School using the Music Standards Fund, this work is not planned or quality-assured with sufficient rigour to enable better than satisfactory impact on students' musical development.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- There is a strong sense of shared purpose among staff and students, and teachers work very hard to promote music, particularly through extra-curricular activities. Administration is extremely thorough, but there is more to do in curriculum planning and the development of teaching if students are to make better than satisfactory progress.
- Similarly, good efforts have been made to nurture partnerships that extend students' musical experiences, but more effective management of these partnerships is required for them to provide better than satisfactory value for money.
- There is limited awareness of primary school music education initiatives, meaning that students' prior experiences are not capitalised upon sufficiently when they join Year 7.

- Self-evaluation is broadly accurate but does not give enough consideration to the inclusion of different groups of students in the music department's work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of curriculum and lesson planning to ensure that:
 - there is an overarching sense of musical progression throughout the Key Stage 3 scheme of work
 - sufficient opportunities are planned to improve singing and to make musical use of ICT in Key Stage 3
 - planning of performing, composing, and listening activities is integrated, particularly in the GCSE course.
- in partnership with Wolverhampton Music School and with feeder primary schools, establish and implement effective plans to build on the Wider Opportunities, singing, and classroom curriculum work in Key Stage 2
- in partnership with Wolverhampton Music School:
 - make more effective use of the 'Zip Rock' project work through more rigorous planning and quality assurance
 - significantly increase the participation of students with special educational needs, in receipt of free school meals, and with English as an additional language in additional music activities
- in partnership with other consortium schools, ensure that the educational planning is as thorough as the administrative organisation of sixth form music courses.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in the school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector