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13 October 2011

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Dear Mr Sprakes

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 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 telephone conversation with a representative of Doncaster Music Service; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work and observation of three class lessons, one of which was jointly observed.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. During the last two years, a major fire which destroyed much of the school, combined with staffing disruption adversely affected music provision. Consequently, some students, during this time, did not receive regular music lessons. However, the current curriculum organisation, particularly for students in Year 9, and weaknesses in teaching continue to limit students' progress.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Standards in Key Stage 3 are below average. Inconsistencies in curriculum provision lead to significant gaps in students' musical knowledge leading to unsatisfactory progress, notwithstanding their varied musical experiences before they join the school. Some students are able to develop their compositions using information and communication technology (ICT), but many lack the ability to include musical devices in their work.

- In 2011, GCSE results improved compared with the previous years; however, standards remain well below the national average. Leaders recognise that students find the composing aspect difficult as they struggle to use appropriate musical techniques and styles. As a result compositions are limited in their creativity and musical invention.
- A very small number of students study music technology in the sixth form. Recent results have been below expectations, both in terms of national standards and the standards expected of those students. Students have satisfactory functional knowledge of the technology; but making their pieces musically interesting is weak.
- A broadly satisfactory number of students receive instrumental or vocal lessons. Although an increasing number, especially girls, are auditioning for parts in the school musical, there are no other instrumental or vocal ensembles.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Students enjoy undertaking practical music activities in lessons but because planning lacks a clear structure, there is a lack of challenge and direction, especially for those who are more able. A lack of musical modelling by either teachers or students, together with few opportunities for students to make musical decisions when evaluating their work, restricts their understanding of how to improve.
- Lessons are carefully introduced to students and they are told what they are to do. However, less regard is given to ensuring that students understand what they have to learn and to considering how this can be measured through regular questioning of students' understanding of music.
- Helpful notes are provided for students studying examination courses to aid their revision and preparation for the listening paper. However, ensuring that gaps in students' musical knowledge are covered in detail, together with making links between different parts of the course, are underdeveloped.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- School leaders recognise that, at present, the curriculum organisation needs reviewing to ensure progression in all aspects of music learning throughout Years 7 and 8. At present, not all aspects of musical learning are covered adequately. The current curriculum arrangement means that students choose either music or drama lessons in Year 9. As a result, this year about a third of students do not receive class music lessons in Year 9. The lack of regular music lessons for all restricts progress, especially for those students who choose a music examination course in Year 10.

- The schemes of work for Key Stage 3, although more detailed compared with those for other key stages, lack depth and a clear indication of how students' musical skills will be developed and progressed. They do not guarantee that all the required elements of music learning are covered during Years 7 and 8 to compensate for the variability of music lessons in Year 9.
- Schemes of work for examination courses in Key Stages 4 and 5 are limited. They provide a brief description of the activities to be undertaken in lessons rather than identifying how to secure the different aspects of students' musical learning and progress.
- Although students have access to music equipment out of lesson time, no instrumental ensembles meet regularly; however, a singing group is planned to start later this term.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is inadequate.

- External issues together with other priorities have prevented music staff from receiving sufficient and timely attention from senior leaders. For example, not enough consideration has been given to monitoring students' progress to ensure that all do as well as they can. Leaders provide financial support for music and are aware that currently, music rooms are geographically isolated which impacts adversely on lunchtime music activities. Plans to site the music rooms in the centre of the new building are designed to alleviate this problem.
- Students are encouraged to take part in music events and consequently an increasing number are becoming involved. There are plans to re-establish music activities with primary schools. Although the music staff are aware of primary school music education initiatives, limited regard is paid to these when planning lessons. Similarly, a lack of continuing professional development limits teachers' knowledge of examination requirements.
- Visiting staff, mainly provided through Doncaster Music Service, are well integrated into the department and music plays a key role in the annual school productions.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of teaching and raising students' attainment by:
 - planning lessons that are sufficiently well structured to provide challenge for all ability groups, especially the more able
 - making sure that students understand how they can make musical improvements to their work
 - more frequent modelling of musical features and characteristics through instrumental or vocal activities
- reviewing the schemes of work, especially for Key Stages 4 and 5 to ensure that all aspects of examination requirements are carefully

integrated and that students can apply theoretical knowledge and musical invention to their practical work

- providing music ensembles so that all students, especially boys, can make music together out of lesson time
- securing improvements in leadership and management by:
 - identifying appropriate priorities for development that are measurable and impact directly on students' attainment
 - ensuring that the assessment of students' work informs future planning and challenge
 - providing appropriate subject support for music from senior leaders.

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

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector