

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



13 October 2011

Mrs J Tridgell
Headteacher
Nova Hreod College
Akers Way
Swindon
Wiltshire
SN2 2NQ

Dear Mrs Tridgell

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 26 and 27 September 2011 with Robin Hammerton HMI 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; a meeting with the head of Swindon Music Service; and observation of five class lessons and an individual singing tutorial.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. Despite first-class accommodation and resources, the amount of curriculum time for music in Key Stage 3 is insufficient and the depth of music curriculum planning across the school is poor. There is no sense of progression in the development of students' musical skills and knowledge, and teaching does not promote the robust and rigorous development of students' musical understanding.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Standards in Key Stage 3 are low. There is little promotion of vocal work, insufficient breadth and depth in students' cultural understanding, and poor development of melodic and rhythmic skills. Considering students' average general prior attainment when they join Year 7 and the involvement of many students in the Swindon Music Service's Key Stage 2 'Wider Opportunities' initiative, progress in Key Stage 3 is inadequate.

- Numbers taking GCSE music are broadly average. Validated standards at GCSE have been low for some years. Overall, Nova Hreod students attained a whole grade lower than the national average for GCSE music in 2010 and 2011. Work seen, produced by current students, is also of a low standard. This, too, represents inadequate progress.
- The proportions of students benefiting from additional instrumental or vocal lessons and/or participating in extra-curricular musical activities are low.
- Students benefit from class music lessons in developing good behaviour and team-working skills. Working relationships between students, and between students and teachers, are generally very positive. This is a direct result of the heavy emphasis on the development of students' personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) across the arts faculty. Positive though this is, however, it does not compensate for their poor progress in developing musical understanding.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- While lessons are planned in detail and resources organised well, there is a persistent lack of rigour and robustness in setting high expectations for the quality of students' work. Far too often, learning objectives are low level, vague, over-generalised or simply not musical. While students generally participate in practical work willingly, frequently they are confused about the musical purpose of the tasks set.
- In other lessons, too much time is spent on verbal explanations with students sitting passively. Some use is made of musical modelling, revealing teachers to be able musicians, but too often this music is played at the students rather than involving them actively. Errors in teachers' explanations also lead to confusion and lack of students' understanding.
- Insufficient guidance is given to GCSE students to support their coursework. While there are very clear procedural documents for them to self-evaluate their progress in each lesson, they are not given clear briefs to define their composing tasks. Listening work is not sufficiently structured or used effectively to help students prepare for their composing coursework.
- Frequent references are made to targets for learning in Key Stage 3, and students' 'levels' are recorded regularly. However, the targets and level descriptors used have been generated for use across all arts subjects and relate much more to aspects of students' PLTS than they do to musical understanding. It is very difficult to see how these level descriptors relate to National Curriculum levels in music.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- In Key Stage 3, music is taught in Years 7 and 8 as part of a carousel with art, dance, and drama. The total time for music in each of these years is 25 hours, delivered through two half-term blocks. In Year 9, students are able to choose three out of the four arts subjects. At present, around 40% of Year 9 students opt for music. Overall, these arrangements do not provide sufficient time for a Key Stage 3 music curriculum of appropriate breadth and depth; neither does the organisation of the carousel structure allow for the ongoing, progressive development and consolidation of students' musical skills.
- The Key Stage 3 scheme of work is incomplete and does not show any sense of musical progression as students move through the school. There are significant omissions, for example in the development of vocal work and in coverage of different musical traditions, styles and genres.
- The Key Stage 4 scheme of work gives an overview of the examination requirements but there is insufficient planning to ensure that course elements are managed and completed in a timely manner.
- Accommodation for music is modern, spacious and well-ordered. There are extensive resources for popular music styles and music technology, including the recording studio. There is also plenty of tuned percussion. Overall, the resources available are excellent but, clearly, are not being used effectively.
- The partnership arrangements with the Swindon Music Cooperative provide useful and valued support for students performing in popular musical styles, through individual tuition and group support. A smaller number of students receive additional tuition from Swindon Music Service teachers.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is inadequate.

- The head of music joined the school as performing arts faculty leader in April 2011, taking over responsibility for music in September 2011. While she has created a clear overall vision and established a strong ethos within the faculty, there remains lack of musical direction and insufficient focus on raising musical standards. Self-evaluation is overgenerous; inspection findings do not reflect the school's view that every aspect of the school's work and students' achievement in music is good.
- There are insufficient links with feeder primary schools to ensure musical continuity and progressions for students as they move from Year 6 to Year 7. It is clear, from discussions with students, that many of them have benefitted from and enjoyed Swindon Music Service's 'Wider Opportunities' programmes in both Years 5 and 6. However, very little is done to evaluate how this prior learning might be built on in secondary school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- revisiting every aspect of music provision to ensure that there is an unequivocal focus on the rigorous development of students' musical understanding, ensuring particularly that
 - curriculum planning in Key Stages 3 and 4 is detailed and shows a clear sense of musical progression, as well as comprehensive coverage of a range of musical styles, traditions and genres
 - sufficient time is given to music in the Key Stage 3 curriculum
 - teaching is always challenging and has a predominant focus on high standards of music making and musical understanding
- in partnership with Swindon Music Service and feeder primary schools, ensuring that the musical experiences of all students in Key Stage 2 are recognised and built on when they join Year 7
- ensuring that rigorous monitoring and self-evaluation, including by senior management, focuses firmly and accurately on the musical quality of students' learning
- as a result, raising musical standards achieved by students so that they are at least in line with expectations across all areas of musical experience in Key Stage 3, and in line with national average points score and A* to C pass rates in GCSE music.

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