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Mr S Lewis
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lewis

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 2 and 3 November 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; observation of three class lessons and visits to three instrumental lessons; and a meeting with the head of Redbridge Music Service.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Students join the school with average levels of prior musical attainment. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are also broadly average, representing satisfactory progress. Achievement is not better because of inconsistencies in students' musical experience. There is good coverage of different musical styles and traditions and regular opportunities to play classroom instruments. However, there are weaknesses in the development of singing and the use of information and communication technology.
- Standards at GCSE have varied in recent years, but overall are in line with national averages. Students taking this course have achieved well, in comparison with their other subjects. The proportions of students opting for music in Key Stage have varied in recent years, from average to below

average. Overall, achievement in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. The one student currently studying for an A level in music is making sound progress and is being taught well.

- The proportions of students receiving additional instrumental and vocal lessons in school are below expectations, as are the number taking part in extra-curricular music activities. A greater number take additional tuition out of school or benefit from participating in the Redbridge Music Service ensembles and clubs.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Classroom teaching and additional instrumental tuition both benefit from good teacher subject knowledge and sound generic teaching skills such as lesson planning and organisation. However, in all cases, there is as much emphasis placed on verbal instruction and explanation as there is on musical demonstration. This means that lesson time is not maximised for students' active music-making, and leads to their satisfactory, rather than good, progress.
- The combination of practical work and theoretical learning in class lessons leads to no better than satisfactory progress because, too often, the theoretical work pre-empts the practical experience.
- Recordings are made of students' classroom work, but these are not undertaken regularly enough; nor are they kept systematically or used to assess students' work.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- All students receive weekly music lessons throughout Years 7 to 9. Schemes of work for Key Stage 3 show a logical development of musical skills and knowledge. Coverage of different musical styles, traditions and genres is good. Particularly noteworthy are the Klezmer project (reflecting the school's context) and the gamelan project, which makes good use of the partnership with Redbridge Music Service. However, planning of how students' vocal skills and use of information and communication technology (ICT) is to be developed is much weaker.
- The scheme of work for Key Stage 4, while brief, provides an adequate indication of how curriculum requirements are to be completed and deadlines met.
- Partnership with Redbridge Music Service also provides a good range of additional instrumental and vocal tuition although, despite the school's 'hardship fund', the cost of this is prohibitive for some students, including those known to be in receipt of free school meals. The organisation of this tuition is another barrier to better than satisfactory progress. Both the school and the music service agree that the current arrangement of short, individual lessons should be reviewed.

- The junior and senior choirs, together with celebration events and regular lunchtime concerts, provide some opportunities for students to perform in ensemble and perform in public. However, regular instrumental ensemble work is restricted to that provided by Redbridge Music Service.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is broadly satisfactory, but at present capacity is not sufficient to promote better than satisfactory outcomes for students.

- The music department runs smoothly from day to day. Last year, one of the two class music teachers left the school due to budget cuts, and was not replaced. You have ensured that curriculum provision has not been reduced, and that A-level music teaching is provided, but this means that the head of department has a very full timetable and carries responsibility for every aspect of music provision.
- Although self-evaluation is overgenerous in every respect, other aspects of leadership and management of music throughout the school are sufficient to bring about satisfactory outcomes for students. However, to bring about further improvements, it is clear that more support is required including better working in partnership with the Redbridge Music Service to improve the effectiveness of additional music tuition, and ensuring that the head of department has sufficient time and opportunity to engage more in relevant continuing professional development.
- Links with feeder primary schools are limited. In particular, better knowledge is needed of the 'Wider Opportunities' and singing programmes in Key Stage 2, to ensure that these are built upon well when students join in Year 7.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- in partnership with Redbridge Music Service, reviewing the arrangements for additional instrumental and vocal tuition so that more students participate in these lessons and the length of lessons increases to enable better musical progress
- significantly increasing opportunities for students to develop their singing and ICT skills in lessons, particularly in Key Stage 3
- ensuring that verbal instruction and explanation support, rather than drive musical learning – both in classroom lessons and in additional instrumental lessons
- building better links with feeder primary schools, particularly to take account of the 'Wider Opportunities' and singing strategies in Key Stage 2
- significantly increasing the opportunities for students from across the school to play instruments in regular ensemble rehearsals and concerts.

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