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Mr M Dale-Emberton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Dale-Emberton

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, governors, parents and carers and students, during my visit on 9 January 2012 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, the local authority, parents and carers, governors and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work including video evidence; and observation of four lessons and a band rehearsal.

The overall effectiveness of music is outstanding.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is outstanding.

- Students enter the school with a very wide range of needs and abilities. You have very high but realistic expectations for all of them in music, which they fully meet.
- Students make excellent progress throughout Key Stage 3. Many can beat time correctly, sing accurately, use rhythm, respond with sensitivity to different musical styles, pitch and dynamics and take part enthusiastically. In a lesson for young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, each student reacted very positively to the stimulus of Tudor and early music, due to the excellent multi-sensory way in which this was presented by staff.
- A wide range of musical opportunities for all groups of Key Stage 4 and 5 students, provided both inside and outside the school day, has a very high

take up. Students perform very well, sometimes to large public audiences. Their singing is accurate and enthusiastic. A school band allows students of all ages with autistic spectrum disorder to perform songs, some of which they compose themselves and which help them to explore their feelings, to a high technical standard.

- Parents and carers are rightly delighted with their children's musical development and the very large improvements in their self-esteem, confidence and communication skills which follow.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is outstanding.

- Expert music teaching, contributed to by many staff, consistently and excellently meets the needs and interests of each student. It demands considerable effort and high-quality responses from all students.
- Staff model musicianship for students constantly, through singing and playing to them. They assess each student's musical progress and development needs accurately, and adapt activities very astutely to meet these needs. They frequently remind students of their previous learning and students become very well practised, as appropriate, at evaluating their own progress. Recordings of students' work are used often to excellent effect in helping them to improve on their previous best.
- Staff are adept at drawing on a wide range of musical styles to enhance learning. For example, in one lesson, students with severe learning disabilities actively explored musical form through a Queen song, Pachelbel's Canon and African drumming.
- Technology is employed regularly in very well-considered ways to help enhance students' learning; but not overused. The school also recognises the key importance of vocal work and the readily available acoustic instruments to the students' musical development.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is very well structured, incorporating a clear progression of challenging musical concepts and ideas. Students enjoy two music lessons each week which ensures that they can often remember and sustain their learning. The separate music curriculum for students with profound and multiple learning disabilities is equally well constructed and appropriately integrated with that for other subjects.
- At Key Stages 4 and 5, students select from a wide range of musical opportunities, including Streetvibes, a BTEC entry level qualification in creative media production. Take up is very high. However, the school has rightly identified that accredited qualifications specifically in music are not available. The range of instrumental lessons available to students is also limited; the school's otherwise strong working relationship with the Greenwich Music Service is not as well developed in this area.

- The school purchases significant music therapy provision from the local NHS Trust. This has a positive impact on students' emotional and other needs and also often contributes well to their musical development.
- Students choose to participate in large numbers in a very wide range of musical activity, including performing at the nearby Blackheath Concert Halls and National Maritime Museum; events in the local community; work with nearby mainstream primary and secondary schools; and very well attended school concerts and assemblies.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is outstanding.

- You have a strong belief in the benefits of music for students' development and well-being. Other staff and governors fully share your vision and understand well key issues about music education. Consequently, music is central to the school's life and used profitably in many other subjects. It is, in many ways, a trailblazer for broader school improvement. School self-evaluation in music is very accurate. It leads consistently to further improvement.
- The day-to-day leadership of music is in the hands of an assistant headteacher. She has considerable subject expertise and guides the development of music, and the work of many other staff, excellently. She works too as a lead music teacher within the local authority.
- Partnerships with the local authority and many other organisations are well developed and effective. You recognise, however, that there is some work to do to improve the musical links and transfer of students' information with the main feeder primary special school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing appropriate opportunities for students to gain specific accreditation for their musical achievements
- broadening the range of instrumental lessons available in partnership, as appropriate, with the Greenwich Music Service
- developing closer musical links with the main feeder primary school.

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

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector