

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr D Crowe  
Headteacher  
The Boswells School  
Burnham Road  
Chelmsford  
Essex  
CM1 6LY

Dear Mr Crowe

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: music**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 28 and 29 February 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 and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of 13 curriculum lessons and a rehearsal of the samba band.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Students make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3. Standards are broadly average; they are not better than this because of inconsistencies in their musical experiences and their understanding of different musical styles. In particular, their knowledge of Western art music is too limited.
- Above-average numbers opt for music courses in Key Stage 4. Results at GCSE are good, with standards above average and those students doing well, compared to their results in other subjects. Results in the sixth form are positive; more consistently so in the traditional music course than in the music technology course, where the 2011 AS level results were very disappointing.

- Good provision for singing is provided in extra-curricular ensembles and through musical theatre productions. However, while a vocal module is offered in Year 7, singing work is not developed rigorously or frequently enough throughout Key Stage 3.
- Overall, the proportion of students participating in additional instrumental and vocal tuition is below that found typically in secondary schools. It is to the school's credit that this tuition is provided at no cost to GCSE and A-level students. This provision helps them to achieve well at GCSE. However, numbers learning in Key Stage 3 are too low. The school was unable to provide details of the numbers of students participating in extra-curricular music activities.

### **Quality of teaching in music**

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Teachers are able musicians and plan lessons in detail. Too often, however, more time is given to talking and explaining verbally than is given to musical application. For example, in a singing session, students engaged in a short warm-up activity that was followed by the teacher analysing their response and explaining, all verbally, what they had to do to improve. This approach means that students' musical responses are interrupted and are not allowed to develop.
- Students' interest in Key Stage 4 and 5 lessons is sustained and they show good commitment to learning. Interest is generally maintained in Key Stage 3 lessons, although occasionally practical group work is not sufficiently well managed and behaviour deteriorates.
- Assessment is regular but is no better than satisfactory because it does not consider students' holistic musical development. Too often, assessment criteria are related to specific technical tasks and these assessments happen too regularly, again taking up too much music time in lessons. Recordings are made at the end of projects, but there is much less use of ongoing recording to help students understand how they can improve their work.

### **Quality of the curriculum in music**

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- Detailed schemes of work are in place for Key Stage 3. These provide opportunities for good coverage in a broad range of music styles and traditions, although in practice less focus is on Western art music than on other music styles. Schemes of work in Key Stages 4 and 5 are less detailed, but ensure that all curriculum requirements are covered in a timely manner.
- A good range of resources is provided, including a suite of computers for music-technology work. However, because this is a shared resource across the arts faculty, its use with Key Stage 3 classes is limited.

- A good range of extra-curricular activities and additional instrumental and vocal tuition is provided by the school, and good links are in place with other local musicians and music groups.
- A good range of courses is provided in Key Stages 4 and 5, including the BTEC that has been introduced for current Year 10 students.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in music**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- The school benefits from a large, committed team of music teachers, giving students the advantage of a diverse music curriculum. The department has good day-to-day management.
- Senior leadership gives good support to music through the provision of resources and good curriculum entitlement. However, teaching observations are too heavily focussed on generic features, such as lesson structures, and much less on the musical quality of teaching.
- Instrumental and vocal lessons are well organised. However, the school has not considered the extent to which different groups of students are involved, particularly in extra-curricular activities.
- Good links are set up with feeder primary schools through special projects, but much less consideration has been given to building on the curriculum work done in feeder schools, particularly through the Wider Opportunities programmes in Year 6.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- through more effective observation of teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3, ensuring that lessons have a clear focus on students' musical learning and progress
- ensuring that good-quality singing work features regularly throughout Key Stage 3
- increasing the depth of students' understanding of Western art music in Key Stage 3
- undertaking a thorough analysis of participation in additional music tuition and extra-curricular musical activities, and taking effective action to increase participation by groups of students found to be underrepresented, particularly in Key Stage 3.

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.

Yours sincerely

**Mark Phillips**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**