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Mr C Lickiss
Principal
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Dear Mr Lickiss

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 20 and 21 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: discussions with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work and observation of four class lessons, individual instrumental lessons and ensemble rehearsals. A discussion was also held with representatives of the Lancashire Music Service.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Standards in Key Stage 3 are below average. Students have limited opportunities to create their own music as lessons are tightly planned and more emphasis is given to other parts, for example performing, of the music curriculum. However, considering students' mixed previous involvement in music activities when they join in Year 7, they make satisfactory progress.
- The Key Stage 4 BTEC course includes some music modules. Those students who completed the course in 2011 attained the grades predicted for them. Work observed by the current Year 11 students indicates that

these students will also meet their expected grades. The musical standards attained by students are lower than that seen nationally but their progress is satisfactory. Singing is popular with students. However, their progress in singing is limited due to the open choice they have when choosing repertoire. The choices that they make do not always suit their vocal ranges and capabilities.

- The proportion of students taking part in music activities and receiving individual instrumental and/or vocal lessons is broadly satisfactory. The lack of music accommodation limits what can be provided. Nevertheless, students enjoy performing and developing their presentation skills. The regular productions and performances enhance their confidence. Older students in particular extend their social and musical skills by working with other, less assured, students.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Lessons are planned in detail and helpful graphic presentations are used to provide students with information about the content of lessons and what they are to do. However, a lack of challenge exists in some lessons because students' musical potential and capabilities are not considered, especially for those who are more able. Students work well together and complete the tasks set but their understanding and involvement in music learning are limited.
- Teachers are able musicians and display their musical skills best when modelling information to students. Too often, however, in class lessons, verbal explanation takes too long and students are not involved sufficiently in demonstrating their understanding and musical skills.
- Individual instrumental lessons and ensemble rehearsals are conducted at a brisk pace with students fully involved and challenged to do their best. Opportunities to involve students through appropriate questioning are taken readily and this contributes well to their progress in these sessions.
- Frequent references are made to the levels students can reach in each lesson. Students are encouraged to grade themselves regularly against different descriptors. However, these descriptors are not pitched accurately against national curriculum levels, and so the process does not ensure that students can identify what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is taught in Years 7 and 8. All requirements are covered with singing a strong feature. The introduction this year of the Musical Futures course for some students in Year 8, although welcomed by students, is restricting the coverage formerly given to the study of world music. Instruments and other equipment for the Musical Futures course

are borrowed from Lancashire Music Service, complementing those provided by the school.

- Some Year 9 students follow the BTEC First Diploma in Performance which includes some music modules. Opportunities are taken where possible to enable students to work with professional musicians, for example when preparing for the Christmas concert. This enables students to understand the world of professional music and contributes significantly to their coursework.
- Only one music room is provided with no additional spaces close by for small group practice during lessons or for use by visiting instrumental teachers. This situation restricts the way that lessons can be planned and also limits the number of rehearsals and individual instrumental lessons that can take place.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- The self-evaluation document provided by leaders gives a realistic overview of music provision within the performing arts faculty. It correctly identifies the key challenges, especially to ensure that all groups of students are involved in music. The generous funding provided allows students to have individual instrumental and/or vocal lessons free of charge. The change introduced to the music curriculum in Year 8 is designed to appeal to boys in particular and encourage more to follow a BTEC course from Year 9. There is a waiting list for some instrumental lessons but it is too early to see if more boys choose music in Key Stage 4.
- Monitoring is undertaken regularly and strong links are in place with teachers from the music service. However, the music staff have insufficient knowledge about students' involvement in Wider Opportunities or the Sing Up programme during their time in primary school. Consequently, the school is unable to build an informative picture about students' musical strengths and capabilities. Combined with an over-reliance on students' prior cognitive abilities when setting targets, this makes it very difficult to measure students' musical progress accurately.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the strong practice evident in some music lessons is spread by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of students' musical capabilities
 - providing work in lessons that meets individual students abilities and takes into account their musical involvement prior to Year 7
 - enabling students to understand how to make improvements to their work and not to become reliant on levels

- making sure that the breadth and variety within the Key Stage 3 curriculum is maintained and that current changes do not marginalise other aspects of study
- establishing a more accurate assessment system to measure students' progress in lessons, which also takes into account their additional music abilities and experiences
- considering how all groups of students, particularly boys, can be represented in music activities.

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