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Mrs A Hill  
Principal  
Northampton Academy  
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Dear Mrs Hill

### **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 25 and 26 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: discussions with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of students' work; observations of six class lessons and extra-curricular groups. A meeting was also held with the Head of Northamptonshire Music and Performing Arts Service.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Standards reached by students at the end of Key Stage 3 are below average. Strengths are in students' ability to manipulate sounds and create compositions using information and communication technology (ICT) equipment, and also in their rhythmic work. Equally, though, weaknesses are in the development of singing and students' ability to use musical terms correctly when listening to and appraising music. Overall, by the end of the key stage, students make satisfactory progress given their prior music abilities and experiences.
- 2011 was the first year that students in Year 11 completed the BTEC First Certificate in music. One third of the cohort was awarded a distinction grade and most students reached or exceeded their targets. The journals

written by students as part of their course indicate they use musical terms correctly as well as their good understanding of marketing, budgeting and producing music events. Work observed suggests that current Year 11 students are displaying similar skills but, like the previous cohort, their composing work is less well developed. Overall, however, BTEC First students make good progress given their starting points.

- Sixth form students started their BTEC Level 3 music course in September 2011. Observations of their work and discussions with students indicate that they are making satisfactory progress.
- Students from all groups receive additional instrumental and/or vocal tuition, but the overall number of students taking part is lower than could be expected. However, the good range of music activities and ensembles attracts a high proportion of students from all age groups, abilities and backgrounds. Several spoke enthusiastically about visits to venues in London and how much they had benefited from working with professional musicians.

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

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Teachers are knowledgeable and competent musicians who use their musical skills to good effect in most lessons, especially when modelling ideas for students and helping them to use the ICT equipment. Compositions completed by former and current students are used successfully to indicate how improvements should be made. Consequently, students benefit from this approach and the opportunities they have to work independently and in small groups.
- Music lessons generally include a practical activity. However, at times, the lack of clear task structure, and insufficient challenge for more able students, limits students' progress.
- Video and audio recordings are made, generally at the end of units of work. Consequently, students are unable to use these to understand how improvements can be made before they present their final pieces. Older students benefit from the detailed written feedback given by their teachers which allows students to set themselves musical goals. Although helpful oral feedback is evident in lessons for Year 7 and Year 8 students with reference made to assessment information, students are not involved in setting themselves music challenges and in identifying musically how improvements should be made. This inconsistency contributes to better progress being made in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3.

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

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- Although the Key Stage 3 curriculum is delivered over two years, all music content is identified, appropriate time allowed and progression is carefully planned. However, in practice, more emphasis is placed on developing

students' ICT skills and preparing them well for Key Stage 4 music than ensuring that their composing and singing skills are progressed equally.

- The BTEC First Certificate in music in Key Stage 4 is welcomed by students, as shown by the increasing numbers choosing this course since it was introduced. They benefit significantly from the exceptional resources, both electronic and acoustic, and the suite of class and practice rooms where they can plan and rehearse their work.
- Long term partnerships have been forged with Northamptonshire Music and Arts Service and with local primary schools. Students take part in some of the county ensembles run by the former organisation. Year 7 students, who belong to the school African drumming group, provide workshops for Year 6 pupils. Many other music activities out of lesson time engage students in music making as well giving them opportunities to complete and develop their coursework using the school facilities. Well-chosen trips to meet, observe and work with professional musicians complement curriculum music particularly for older students.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- The head of department, through her vision and understanding of how to engage students and provide courses that meet their needs, has successfully increased the number of students involved in music. Performing by students, either of their own compositions or as part of their examination course, in assembly is a regular occurrence.
- All leaders demonstrate commitment to the subject and regular monitoring ensures that weaknesses are identified and rapid actions taken to improve provision. Staff benefit from appropriate training that gives them a clear understanding of current developments in music education. Self-evaluation is thorough and broadly accurate but does not always give full consideration between the quality of teaching for different students and in different key stages, which is inconsistent, and impact on students' outcomes.

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

- improving the overall quality and consistency of teaching and student progress throughout the academy by:
  - considering how the good practice evident in some lessons can be shared and developed
  - ensuring that all learning challenges different ability groups appropriately
  - using audio and video recordings regularly to enable students to take ownership of their work and identify how improvements can be made
- ensuring that the teaching of students' music skills, particularly singing, are all given equal consideration in lessons throughout 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

**Marianne Young**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**