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Mrs K Stoner
Principal
St George's Church of England School
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Dear Mrs Stoner

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 31 January and 1 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 pupils'/students' work; and observation of four class lessons, a small group guitar session, and rehearsals of the pop choir and school band.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Although students' prior attainment is below average when they join in Year 7, standards remain low throughout Key Stage 3 and they do not make sufficient progress. Students have poor understanding of rhythmic and melodic structures. Their depth and breadth of knowledge of different musical styles, traditions and genres is weak.
- The proportion of students taking a music course in Key Stage 4 has diminished in recent years, and are now below those seen nationally. Standards achieved in the 2010 GCSE music course were in line with the national average, and these students made good progress compared with their results in other subjects. In 2011, seven students were entered for

the BTEC music course with three achieving distinction* grades. However, work seen by the eight current GCSE students, in Year 9, is of a low standard. As with Years 7 and 8, current GCSE students have poor understanding of musical syntax and limited knowledge of different musical styles. Across the school, students' performing work is more confident than other aspects of their musical learning, although important issues such as posture are insecure.

- The proportion of students receiving additional instrumental tuition and/or participating in extra-curricular musical activities is low, even given the context of the school. Many more girls than boys are involved, and there is a considerable drop-off in involvement during the school year and after Year 8. However, for those students that are involved, participation makes a good contribution to improving their self-confidence and general personal development.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Lessons are structured and resources prepared satisfactorily. All lessons include practical music-making activities. However, these take too far long to start. Tasks are preceded by too much verbal explanation and there is not enough engagement with students through verbal or musical dialogue. Too often, over-simplistic verbal and musical explanation of musical concepts leads to confusion or inaccuracies in student understanding which are not then corrected.
- The planned curriculum contains a satisfactory breadth and depth of coverage. However, teachers' choices not to include all planned topics lead to a critical imbalance in students' understanding of different musical styles. Far too much emphasis is on popular music, with much less coverage of other musical traditions.
- Scrutiny of students' work over time shows overdependence on written activities but little evidence of composing work. A baseline assessment is made at the start of Year 7. Although this includes aural tests, these too are predicated on written answers and theoretical knowledge rather than musical understanding and aptitude.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Every student receives a weekly one-hour music lesson in Years 7 and 8. It is to the school's credit that the GCSE course has been reintroduced, even though numbers are small.

- Schemes of work are currently being revised, following the whole-school change to a two year Key Stage 3 programme and the decision to reintroduce the GCSE course. As planned, these schemes provide an adequate breadth of musical styles and activities in Key Stage 3 and suitable coverage of the GCSE course requirements.
- There is a reasonable range of extra-curricular musical activities. Small group instrumental tuition on woodwind, brass and guitar is provided by the Lead Learner and another member of the school staff.
- The school has invested heavily in music technology resources, although these are not used well enough in teaching. There is a reasonable assortment of percussion instruments. The school has also used its delegated music standards funding to purchase woodwind and brass instruments for students to borrow when taking additional instrumental lessons.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- Prior to the inspection, you and the senior team had recognised concerns with aspects of music provision and had sought external help and support for the department. This has brought improvements to generic aspects of teaching, such as lesson planning and management. However, as the joint observation with the Vice Principal showed, teacher expectations for students' musical progress together with weaknesses in planning are still preventing standards rising sufficiently, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- The Lead Learner for music puts commendable effort into organising and leading the additional instrumental tuition and extra-curricular groups. The department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. However, with reductions in staffing for curriculum music and without the support of specialist instrumental teachers, this means that much less consideration is given to leadership of other aspects of provision, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- There are positive partnerships with feeder primary schools, particularly through visits made by the school band. Groups from the school participate in local events, such as the Charles Dickens Festival. However, there are limited opportunities for students to engage regularly with professional musicians; there are no partnerships with the local authority music service or other providers to extend the range of additional opportunities available.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising expectations so that achievement improves significantly in all aspects of musical learning, through a relentless focus on musical teaching, high standards of musical response, and improving students' technical skills (including posture) and understanding of musical syntax

- significantly increasing the participation and retention of students, especially boys, in additional instrumental/vocal tuition and in extra-curricular musical activities
- developing partnerships so that students are able to draw on a wider range of teacher expertise, including for additional instrumental tuition
- ensuring that the revision of curriculum plans provides sufficient breadth and depth of coverage, and that teaching ensures that these plans are realised fully.

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