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Mr P Evans  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Evans

### **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 27 and 28 March 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 5 class lessons, two individual additional tuition lessons, and rehearsals of the orchestra and chamber ensemble.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Students' overall academic abilities when they join in Year 7 are exceptionally high. They also have high levels of aural awareness and musicality. Standards at GCSE and A level are high, but no better than should be expected, given students' starting points. In 2011, the average grade achieved by GCSE students in music was around half a grade lower than the standards attained in their other subjects. A level students' achievement in music was in line with expectations, given their starting points. Relative weaknesses in composing work, particularly when compared to standards of instrumental and vocal performance, are evident in Key Stages 4 and 5.

- Achievement in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. It is not better than this because of inconsistencies in curriculum coverage and because of restrictions in students' creative responses. They have better knowledge about music than they have appreciation of music because much more emphasis is placed on learning musical concepts theoretically than on extended musical application through composing and listening. They also have disproportionately greater knowledge of western art music styles than they do of world music or popular music styles.
- Overall, a good number of students participate in extra-curricular music activities. Of particular note is the way that students' involvement is maintained as they progress through the school, including in the sixth form. However, significant differences exist between the participation of boys and girls; while four in every 10 girls take part, less than two in every 10 boys is involved.

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

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Classroom teaching benefits from strong subject knowledge. Very good musical leadership is given to extra-curricular ensembles; high expectations for standards of singing and instrumental playing lead to very successful performances, such as the recent production of 'Carmina Burana'. However, such musical leadership is not replicated in classroom teaching. Planning of individual lessons is brief, at best, and does not differentiate between the needs of individual students. Too much teaching is couched in verbal, theoretical explanation, with students required to respond on paper without first relating their responses to musical sound. They have little difficulty in understanding the theoretical and verbal concepts, but this approach inhibits the development of their aural and musical understanding and is a key reason why achievement is only satisfactory rather than good or outstanding. While some students are able to rehearse musical sounds inside their heads, others are not and the results of their theoretical responses are much weaker.
- The music department is well equipped with up-to-date music technology resources, but these are underused in class music lessons. Some recordings are made of students' work, but these are not undertaken regularly enough or used sufficiently to help students understand how to improve the quality of their musical responses.

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

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- In common with the rest of the school, the Key Stage 3 curriculum is provided through Years 7 and 8. Curriculum planning for these two years is sufficient to provide a broad overview of the activities to be covered. However it is no better than satisfactory, and requires improvement, because it barely covers the full range of musical styles, traditions and genres that students need to give them a broad cultural understanding or

good preparation for the diversity of musical styles that they should encounter at GCSE and A level. Planning at A level ensures that all aspects of the course are covered in timely fashion, and the three-year sixth form allows them to take additional qualifications such as Grade VIII theory. Planning for the GCSE course is less detailed, however.

- A good range of additional vocal and instrumental lessons is in place; take-up for these is well above those found typically in secondary schools. A good range of ensembles is also provided; these include jazz ensembles led by sixth form students. All of these groups give the students involved excellent experience of performing works from the standard orchestral and choral repertoire.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- Excellent investment has been made by the governing body in extending and refurbishing accommodation for music. The school's senior management have astutely recognised that while the extra-curricular ensembles and performances are well led and managed, and make a significant contribution to school life, curriculum provision in music is not as strong. Self-evaluation has correctly recognised that examination results have not been as good as they could be although, prior to the inspection, observation of classroom practice had not been able to identify the reasons for this. Observation of teaching has given too much attention to generic features such as lesson structures and procedures, with not enough consideration given to the musical quality of teaching and learning. In addition, there has not been close enough monitoring of curriculum planning.
- The additional instrumental and vocal teachers are not employed directly by the school – rather, they are independent practitioners who make use of the school's facilities and make direct arrangements for payment with parents. While the programme is organised efficiently, this arrangement means that the school does not have a direct and formal role in assuring the quality of provision. The two lessons sampled during the inspection suggested that the quality of teaching in these lessons is variable, and would benefit from closer monitoring.
- The Director of Music has well-established professional connections through membership of the Music Masters' and Mistresses' Association, but has less involvement with other aspects of music education nationally. Senior leaders rightly recognise the significant contribution that he makes to extra-curricular music, but greater consideration should be given to the balance of time and energy given to curriculum provision together with the pressures that this brings on a department with only one full-time member of staff, supported by a part-time classroom teacher and a team of self-employed peripatetic teachers. Re-evaluating staffing provision for music, so that standards in the curriculum match those in extra-curricular music, is a key area for improvement.

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

- strengthening the curriculum in Key Stage 3 to give greater depth of coverage for world and popular music styles
- improving the quality of teaching by ensuring that lessons in all key stages give priority to developing students' aural and practical understanding of music, supported and not driven by theoretical knowledge about music, particularly in listening and composing work
- reviewing the staffing arrangements for music to ensure that the Director of Music, supported by other staff, are able to give the same energy and quality of musical leadership to curriculum music as is given to extra-curricular performance work.

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**