

22 May 2012

Mr J McNaughton
Headteacher
Morecambe Community High School
Dallam Avenue
Morecambe
Lancashire
LA4 5BG

Dear Mr McNaughton

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 9 and 10 May 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; a meeting with the Head and Area Head of Lancashire Music Service; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of seven class lessons, an individual flute lesson, and a rehearsal of the folk band.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Students have widely varied experiences of music before they join Year 7; overall, musical standards on entry are below expectations. Progress is just satisfactory because standards remain below average throughout Key Stage 3. Standards of singing are below expectations, and students' knowledge of different musical styles and traditions is inconsistent.
- Standards in GCSE music are also below average, with progress again only satisfactory, given that students' prior standards are below average. The numbers opting for GCSE have been consistently broadly average, although the current Year 10 group is smaller because of whole-school curriculum changes.
- Progress in the sixth form BTEC course is positive and students enjoy participating in lessons and concerts. Standards of musical performance are broadly average compared with those typically seen in Level 3 courses.

- The proportion of students receiving additional instrumental or vocal tuition is lower than that typically found in secondary schools, but is broadly satisfactory given the school's contexts. Similarly, the numbers participating in extra-curricular musical activities are below average, although those who do take part do so with great enthusiasm and make a significant contribution to school life.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Lesson planning is thorough and sets out exactly what activities students are expected to complete. While teachers are able musicians and always plan active music-making tasks, the flow of students' learning is too frequently interrupted by extended interludes of verbal instruction and discussion. Planning conforms to the school's expectations for peer assessment and, rightly, the promotion of key skills such as literacy; however these considerations dominate teachers' thinking rather than increasing the depth of students' musical understanding. As a result, teaching in music is not better than satisfactory.
- Teaching does not challenge the musical quality of students' work rigorously enough. More emphasis is placed on the functional completion of activities, rather than on the quality of musical response. Consequently, the depth of students' musical understanding remains shallow. For example, Year 9 students making arrangements of the song 'Yellow Submarine' developed a good understanding of how to operate the 'Garageband' program through dragging and dropping pre-composed ideas into a drum-track; however they only had a very limited understanding of the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic structures of the song.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work are planned in detail, in all key stages. The sixth form BTEC course is particularly well planned. In Key Stage 3, although a wide range of musical styles and traditions is touched upon, too much emphasis is placed on popular music styles and not enough consideration is given to Western art-music styles for the curriculum to be considered better than satisfactory.
- A reasonable range of additional instrumental and vocal tuition meets the needs and interests of students. Extra-curricular ensembles such as the Folk Band and Jazz Group are much enjoyed by the participating students, and the annual musical theatre productions are highly regarded within the school community.
- The three classrooms for curriculum music are in three different buildings; while they are all ordered and appropriately equipped, this arrangement is not ideal. Of more concern is the practice room used for instrumental and vocal tuition; this room is not fit for purpose because of poor access and the room's dual use as a store cupboard. Alternative, appropriate accommodation for this tuition must be provided as a matter of urgency.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- The music department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. All three curriculum teachers contribute to the management of curriculum courses and extra-curricular activities. A further strength of management is in your self-evaluation of music, which accurately identified that provision and outcomes are only satisfactory.
- A substantial sum is allocated to the music department to support additional tuition and extra-curricular music. The school buys in one instrumental teacher from the Lancashire Music Service and five independently employed instrumental and vocal teachers; lessons taught by these staff are efficiently organised. Students are made aware of other local opportunities, such as those provided by More Music. However you recognise that, given all the funding and resources available, it is disappointing that students do not make better progress in music. It is also disappointing that only a minority of your feeder primary schools benefit from the 'Wider Opportunities' programmes. The new music hub, starting in September 2012, provides an opportunity to improve partnership working, including ensuring that your students benefit much more from the partnership working; developing this opportunity is a key area for improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing alternative, appropriate accommodation for the additional instrumental and vocal tuition, as a matter of urgency
- with leadership from the school's senior management, implementing a strategy in partnership with the new Lancashire Music Hub, feeder primary schools, and other local providers that ensures good use of the school and national funding for music education and which leads to good and outstanding musical achievement for students of all ages
- ensuring that lesson planning provides a strong emphasis on improving the depth of students' musical understanding, and that teaching consistently challenges the quality of students' musical responses.

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