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Mr G Maslen
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Dear Mr Maslen

Ofsted subject inspection programme – Music

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 31 October and 01 November 2006 to look at work in music.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the extent to which every student was benefiting from your music provision. In particular, it sought to explore the links you may have developed with other schools and agencies, such as the local Music Service or other professional musicians, in order to improve continuity and increase opportunity for all your students.

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 unless to highlight exceptional practice. In such circumstances the school would be contacted prior to publication to agree the exact wording. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons, ensembles, instrumental tuition and a Year 9 assembly.

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Standards are exceptionally and consistently high. Students enter school with a wide range of musical skills. They quickly progress so that by the time they leave their achievement is outstanding. Students enjoy music and they particularly like the many opportunities they get to be creative and perform in public. Students in Key Stage 3 demonstrate excellent use of musical vocabulary and enjoy creating music. They have access to a vast range of musical activities.
- All students following the GCSE course are accomplished performers on their chosen instruments. Composition skills are strong with pieces ranging from Christmas carols to rock and roll. Students love making music and many wish to continue their musical studies beyond school.
- Sixth form students are also excellent performers they understand how music is structured and how and why particular music has been created in response to particular stimulus. Students do not need to have studied music at GCSE to be accepted on the course. Standards are high and they achieve extremely well.

Quality of teaching and learning of music

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Students learn exceptionally well because of the outstanding teaching they receive. Lessons are well planned and have a clear focus on music making. Teachers are highly committed, excellent musicians and share their subject expertise very well with students. They have very high expectations of what students can do. Excellent working relationships between staff and students underpin all activities. Assessment procedures are exemplary. All aspects of the department's work are thoroughly analysed and the information is used skilfully to inform future planning.
- The quality of the instrumental tuition is good but at times unimaginative. For example, some dated resources are used that do not fully engage the interest of students and occasionally restricts their enjoyment. Nevertheless, there are over 220 students learning instruments in school, this contributes significantly to students' achievement in music and their personal and social development.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The overall quality of the curriculum and extra-curricular provision is good.

- The curriculum is good and extra-curricular provision is exceptional. The strong focus on creativity ensures that lessons are highly musical and meet the needs and interests of students very well. Previous musical skills are built upon through a series of sequential musical activities and topics which also enable students to learn about the various career routes available in music. Within this traditional range of topics there is a good focus on singing and many opportunities to sing in lessons and in the various school vocal groups. However, students in Key Stage 3 do not use

computers enough to manipulate and refine their pieces, nor do they study enough music from other cultures or genres such as the most recent pop music. Accommodation is poor but teachers and students make the best use of it to prevent it being a barrier to achievement.

- A significant strength of the curriculum is the fantastic range of opportunities for students to make music together. They value these activities highly and feel that their personal and social development is enhanced alongside their musical prowess. Regular visits to perform in the local community and abroad and performances by several visiting artists enrich students' learning. Students are confident young adults and feel that the performances they take part in are vitally important. One Year 7 boy described the recent concert to celebrate national music week as "the best day in my life so far".

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are outstanding.

- The high quality provision of music is largely due to the outstanding leadership and management of the subject. Music is an integral part of school life and contributes significantly to the emotional and personal development of many students. All ensembles are open to any student regardless of ability. The GCSE course is open access but students are told that to be able to play an instrument is a distinct advantage. Consequently, all students have equal opportunity to develop their musical interests.
- Regular monitoring and evaluation of how well the department is doing results in a clear understanding of the strengths and what needs to be improved. Instrumental teachers are part of the school contracted staff and feel fully involved. Teachers keep up to date with developments in music education and managers have a good knowledge of the latest national initiatives for music. Despite the consistently high standards there is no hint of complacency.

Subject issue

Data collection

On entering the school, students are given a benchmark test to establish their musical skills and experience. This is used very well to inform future planning and ensure that they make as much progress as possible. Regular assessment of work allows teachers to accurately spot if anyone is underachieving or if individuals need pushing further. The collection and use of data to promote students' progress is outstanding.

Partnerships

Through the 'Campus Calderdale' collaboration, the music department works well in partnership with other secondary schools. The sharing of resources and expertise are a particular strength of this partnership. Links with other music organisations such as local amateur groups and neighbouring local authority ensembles are strong. However, links with the local music service are not fully developed.

Inclusion

- The school works diligently to ensure all students benefit from music within and beyond the school. The curriculum provision and excellent range of high quality extra-curricular activities provide outstanding opportunities for all students to extend their musical experiences.
- Music is such an important part of school life that every student is touched by it in some way. The wider impact of music is evident in the way in which students are becoming responsible, confident and articulate young adults. The performance standards are exceptional and this is reflected in the high quality concerts and the excellent examination results.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that a wider range of cultures and genres are represented in the music curriculum. Particularly, music from non-Western cultures and current pop music
- ensuring students in Years 7 to 9 regularly use computers to enhance the music they create.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Briggs
Additional Inspector