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05 December 2006

Mrs Linda Brooks  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Brooks

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme 2006/7 – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit, on 20 and 21 November 2006. At the end of the inspection I fed back my judgements and this letter is to confirm my findings.

The purpose of this inspection was to evaluate the provision of music in Key Stages 3 and 4 at your school. The visit provided much useful evidence for the next Ofsted reviews of music and the wider evaluation of developments in these subjects. Your school will not be named in any publication without your permission and most evidence will be used at a general level, to identify trends and issues for development.

#### Achievement & standards

Overall, achievement and standards are good.

- Although standards in Key Stage 4 are broadly average, results at GCSE have been improving and pupil numbers have increased. Given their starting points, pupils achieve well. In the Year 10 lesson observed, pupils demonstrated a secure grasp of Bhangra music, especially the complex rhythms.
- Attainment in Key Stage 3 is also in line with national expectations and pupils' achievement is good given their starting points on entry in Year 7. Teacher assessments indicate that although the proportion reaching Level 5 is just above average, fewer pupils reach Level 6 than might be expected. Work is effectively grounded in practical activities and pupils in a Year 8 lesson confidently played a simple chord sequence on the guitar.

- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. In particular, attitudes to music making in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities are outstanding. Pupils make good progress in their instrumental lessons and in extra-curricular activities.
- Some high quality music making was observed and many pupils were still buzzing with excitement following their recent performance in the Schools' Prom at the Royal Albert Hall with the Daventry Strings. The playing of the string group demonstrated high levels of musicianship and commitment.
- Music makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. Typical of this was the peer support given by one experienced Year 11 boy to a younger pupil at the back of the 3<sup>rd</sup> violins in the string group.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Good teaching is characterised by good relationships and the effective use of complementary skills within a small and knowledgeable team. Good use is made of specialist instrumental staff and the inspirational contribution of the visiting string teacher is significant. Treating her pupils as professionals, her high expectations and emphasis on good technique alongside musical expressiveness lifts the performance of the pupils. Skilled teaching was also seen in a Year 8 lesson in which the calm approach of the teacher gave the pupils confidence and a sense of both enjoyment and achievement.
- Where teaching is less successful, the pace of learning is too slow because the teacher fails to engage pupils actively and the assessment of their progress does not spot where pupils are having difficulties.

### Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- There is a good range of experiences in the curriculum which builds progressively on pupils' previous experiences. The department has rightly identified providing a better balance of composing and performing activities in Key Stage 3 as central to raising the number of pupils reaching higher levels by the end of Year 9.
- There is an outstanding range of enrichment activities for the committed young musicians. In addition, attendance at the local Saturday morning music school and in county ensembles provides valuable additional opportunities for some pupils.
- Overall, the curriculum is well planned to meet the needs and aptitudes of all pupils.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the subject are good.

- The subject is confidently led by a committed and experienced head of department who has done much to improve and sustain standards since the last inspection, when provision was judged unsatisfactory.
- Good support is provided by the headteacher. Subject monitoring and self evaluation procedures are currently under-developed although this is a priority for improvement. However the department knows what it does well and has drawn up sensible and realistic plans for further improvement.

## Overall effectiveness of the subject

The overall effectiveness of music is good with some outstanding features, particularly the high standards of performance reached by some of the school's instrumental ensembles.

## Subject issues

- Assessment and the use of data are good. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked and assessments against clear criteria are regularly made. The system is manageable and enables intervention for underachieving pupils to be effectively targeted. However, very little data is collected from primary schools about pupils' musical attainment on entry, although there are records of pupils who learn instruments through the county music service.
- The school is making good use of partnerships with others to extend and enrich its music provision. The work of the head of department as an advanced skills teacher in linking with both local primary schools and post 16 institutions with A-level teaching has proved invaluable, helping to ensure an effective transition between different schools. Good links are also maintained with the county music service and the Saturday Music School which is run on site.

## Inclusion

- The department is committed to inclusion, and a reasonable proportion of pupils are involved in instrumental lessons and in the musical life of the school more generally. The school has been proactive in using music technology to help motivate pupils at risk of exclusion through its alternative curriculum programme.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards, in particular the proportion of pupils reaching higher levels by the end of Year 9, by ensuring there are more opportunities for composing in the classroom
- improving teaching further by increasing opportunities for teachers to share good practice through regular monitoring and ensuring assessment in the classroom is used more consistently to check on pupils' progress.

I very much hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop music and religious education in your school. A copy of this feedback will be sent to your local authority.

In 6-12 months after the inspection visit, we would like to gather information on the impact of this inspection on the improvements in this subject in your school. To this end you may be contacted by telephone or sent a questionnaire to complete. We appreciate your co-operation in this evaluation.

Yours sincerely

Tony Shield  
Additional Inspector