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Dear Mrs Mansfield

Ofsted subject inspection programme – Music and History

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 18 and 19 October 2006 to look at work in music and history.

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 and instrumental tuition.

Music

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards in music

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students enjoy making music. Standards are above average and students achieve well. They enter school with a wide range of musical attainment and prior musical experience. They quickly make progress as a result of effective teaching and well planned lessons that focus highly on music making. In addition, self-confidence and leadership skills are developed well through team activities such as ensembles and group work.

- The relatively small numbers who continue to study music in Years 10 and 11 also make good progress and standards are above average. Performance skills are particularly strong because students get regular opportunities to perform within school and with groups such as the City of Bradford Youth Orchestra and the Bradford Cathedral Choir. This greatly enhances students' personal development as well as their musical experience. In Year 12, students are very competent performers on their chosen instrument and they produce imaginative compositions using notation software. Standards are above average.

Quality of teaching and learning of music

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Students learn well because teaching is good. Relationships between teachers and students are a real strength of the department. Because teachers have secure subject knowledge they are able to give musical demonstrations that inspire the students to do well. Learning objectives are shared at the outset of every lesson and there is always a musical starter activity to get the students in the mood for making music.
- While work is generally well matched to each learner, some of the more musically talented students are occasionally given work that is too easy for them. Similarly, because not enough consideration is given for students with specific learning disabilities or language problems they sometimes find the work too hard.
- The quality of the instrumental teaching provided by the local music service is good and on occasions outstanding. For example, students taking part in a string quintet session attained extremely high levels of musicality as a result of the carefully crafted questioning and expert demonstration of the highly skilled, specialist teacher.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum enables students to make good progress. It is enhanced by a good range of ensemble and performance opportunities. Effective benchmarking of students musical skills as they enter the school results in accurate targets being set and a curriculum developed that meets the needs and interests of most students well. Singing is an integral part of the curriculum and students are given opportunities to perform in choirs and musical productions.
- Through imaginative schemes of work students learn about the various career routes available in music. Teachers and students make the best use of limited accommodation. A strength of the curriculum is the emphasis on performance skills assisted by the good quality visiting instrumental and vocal teachers.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good and there is good capacity to improve.

- The department operates very well on a day-to-day basis. Documentation is of high quality and curriculum planning is particularly strong. The management of the visiting instrumental teachers is well organised and guidance given ensures that they feel part of the department. Students value the way they are all actively encouraged to take part in musical activities.
- Proactive work is undertaken to encourage all students to focus on music when they enter school through imaginative 'play-days' each year. Assessment procedures are strong. Consequently, students know their targets well and what to do to achieve them. Leadership has a good understanding of the strengths and areas requiring development. However, there is less awareness of national initiatives in music such as the Key Stage 3 music strategy and the instrumental and vocal provision in Key Stage 2.
- Data collection is good. A wide range of information is collected about students' previous musical experiences and their different musical interests. An initial musical skills test helps to level the standards and quickly establishes a base line for future assessment. Information about instrumentalists is obtained from the local music service and this allows the department to know how many instrumentalists join each year.

Inclusion in music

- The school provides satisfactory opportunity for all pupils to benefit fully from the provision for music. There is open access to examination courses and students are encouraged to take part in extra-curricular activities. However, the response to these opportunities is not as positive as it could be. Some students lose interest as they progress through the school. Consequently, fewer students than normal take part in musical activities and examination courses.
- Satisfactory opportunities are provided for all students to acquire the necessary skills and experiences to be able to access appropriate life and career opportunities in music.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring work is matched carefully to the needs of all students so that they can achieve as well as possible
- developing musical opportunities for all students so that take up increases in extra-curricular activities and the numbers studying music in Key Stage 4.

History

The overall effectiveness of history was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement & standards in history

Standards in both the main school and sixth form are average and achievement is satisfactory.

- With the exception of disappointing GCSE performance in 2006, attainment has been average for a number of years. Although girls reach higher standards than boys, the difference in standards is not significant. There is a similar picture in Key Stage 3.
- After several years of below average attainment, standards in the sixth form are beginning to rise quite markedly as a result of better teaching and a change in course content. In 2006, the percentage of students attaining at the higher grades of A and B was above average. In work seen and lessons observed, this level of performance is being maintained and students are making good progress.
- Personal development is good. History is a popular subject and has been for some time. Pupils speak highly of their teachers, behave maturely and are eager to learn. Pupils are courteous and welcoming to visitors and interact well in pairs and groups.

Quality of teaching and learning of history

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, with examples of good and outstanding practice.

- Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject and all staff demonstrate real enthusiasm in delivering it to their pupils and students.
- Planning and preparation are good and teachers care deeply for their students in both academic and pastoral terms. Pupils with learning difficulties receive good support from teaching assistants but resources to support them with revision are too complex and are more suited to pupils of higher ability.
- The use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool is a major strength and PowerPoint presentations written by both teachers and pupils do much to bring history alive in the classroom. Sixth form students are helped by use of the whiteboard, which reinforces their understanding of quite complex material; for example, the effect of the Suffragettes.
- In a significant minority of lessons, learning is too teacher-directed and pupils do not involve themselves fully in the activities. Challenge suffers as a result and pupils' attention wanders and they lose concentration. Pupils are not always fully aware of the learning objectives in these lessons.

- Assessment in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is good. Pupils and students benefit from detailed comments on how they can improve their work. In Key Stage 3, assessment is less well developed and it has only limited impact on teaching. This also means that pupils' targets are not realistic enough. There is no moderation of National Curriculum levels awarded to pupils at the end of Key Stage 3.

Quality of the curriculum in history

The curriculum is good and meets the needs and aspirations of pupils and students in the sixth form.

- The Year 7 course comprises both discrete lessons in history and an integrated humanities programme. These arrangements provide good history and ensure that pupils have the same teacher for three hours per week and thus provide effective transition from the primary school. Historical skills are introduced early in the course and the analysis of source material and the nature of bias are given appropriate coverage during each module.
- Pupils enjoy the GCSE course, particularly the local coursework element on Saltaire. Pupils would benefit from having one teacher in Key Stage 4 rather than two to improve coherence.
- The sixth form curriculum was modified after a detailed evaluation of A-level examination performance. The new course is more suited to the interests of students and results have improved as a result.
- A wide range of historical trips enhances the curriculum. There are residential visits to the battlefields of Belgium and the Normandy landing beaches and pupils enjoy their days out to Skipton, to London and to the Thackray Medical Museum in Leeds.

Leadership and management of history

Subject leadership and management are satisfactory

- For some time, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in the department have been informal. Current arrangements are insufficiently rigorous.
- There is good teaching practice in the department but it is not shared systematically.
- The understanding and use of data to raise standards is developing well but has yet to make the necessary impact on assessment in Key Stage 3.
- The use of ICT to make lessons more interesting is a strength and teachers now use PowerPoint well.

Inclusion in history

The department tries hard to involve everyone in what the subject has to offer.

- Girls reach higher standards than boys and the department is modifying resources in order to make them more accessible to boys.
- Teachers plan in detail and prepare their lessons thoroughly but learning objectives are not always clear to pupils.
- Teaching assistants are effective in supporting pupils with learning difficulties and teachers are concerned to ensure that these youngsters receive their full curricular entitlement in history.
- Revision booklets written by members of the department are beautifully produced and the department is now looking to modify them further in order that they may provide full support for pupils of all levels of ability.

Literacy and history

History makes a satisfactory contribution to pupils' literacy skills but the department recognises that the approach needs to be more systematic.

- Each classroom is adorned with lists of historical terminology and the department is extending this display to include connectives and examples of how to produce effective extended writing.
- Speaking and listening are fostered well in many lessons and there also opportunities for pupils to comment orally on the presentations of their classmates.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the more systematic monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department
- the improved use of assessment data to influence teaching
- the introduction of moderation of National Curriculum levels in Key Stage 3 in order that more realistic pupil targets may be set
- addressing the inconsistency in the quality of teaching and encouraging the sharing of good practice across the department
- introducing a more coherent approach to the development of pupils' literacy skills.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and Education Bradford 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