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Mrs A Guyver
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Guyver

Ofsted subject inspection programme – Music

Thank you for the hospitality and co-operation of your staff, during my visit on Wednesday 01 and Thursday 02 November 2006 to look at work in music. I was sorry not to be able to see you in person but understand the significance of your other commitments.

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 pupil 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 pupils.

I was very interested to see all the Music College developments that have already been achieved and to get some sense of the planned developments. 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 music staff and senior staff with line management responsibility for music, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' recorded work, discussion with a group of Year 9 pupils and observation of three Key Stage 3 music lessons and three extra-curricular music activities.

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. Pupils have positive attitudes towards music. They behave very well in lessons and show an obvious enjoyment of the subject.
- Pupils start in Year 7 with a very wide range of musical experiences. While they make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3, further improvement is constrained by: the timetable, where pupils do not have a regular music lesson each week; insufficient practice rooms to meet the needs of the practical nature of the curriculum; large teaching groups; and insufficient resources and accommodation when two classes are timetabled at the same time.
- Achievement and standards at Key Stage 4 are good. Pupils make good progress. The percentage of pupils gaining A*- C grades in music is above the national average. Although no lessons were observed at Key Stage 4, scrutiny of a range of recorded evidence confirmed the high standards achieved.
- The overall standard of the extra-curricular groups is satisfactory and some rock groups achieve a good standard. However, progress in some groups is constrained both by the lack of time for the staff to support all the various ensembles, and by the size of available rehearsal spaces for larger groups such as the 65-strong orchestra.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning in music is good. Pupils enjoy music.

- Teaching by all the music teachers is highly effective within the constraints noted above in Key Stage 3. They form good relationships with pupils and make good use of the excellent interactive teacher support materials devised by the head of department. Questioning strategies are effective and pupils learn through practical music making both individually and in groups. Of note is the extensive and effective use of homework where pupils are required to complete musical tasks on the computers in their own time.
- Assessment is regular and developing well, although Key Stage 3 teacher assessments are over-generous.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The practical nature of the music curriculum and the focus on Rock music is highly appropriate and is attracting a wider range of pupils. The Saturday morning rock school is popular and growing in numbers.
- Singing remains an area of concern within the curriculum and has been identified by the department as an area for development.
- There is a wide range of musical opportunities, both formal ensembles and informal rock bands for all pupils.
- The music accommodation is used extensively at all times of the day for ensemble rehearsals and by individual pupils working on homework tasks.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of music are good.

- The head of department has high aspirations for the development of music and is well-informed about recent national music initiatives. He has a strong vision for the development of music and a determined drive to make the music college succeed.
- All the music staff work well together as a team and have a strong capacity to make the necessary improvements to further raise standards.
- Departmental self-evaluation is accurate, although insufficient progress has been made with developing singing within the curriculum and Key Stage 3 teacher assessments are over-generous.

Subject issues

Partnerships

- Links with some outside agencies are good. They are positive and mutually beneficial. For example, the link with Roland UK enables the school to try out new music hardware and software, and Roland to learn from the practical application of some of their products. Plans to link with feeder primary schools are planned next year.

Data Collection

- Music transition data is embryonic. There is involvement in the Specialist Schools' baseline testing project but there is still much work to do. For example, current music testing does not yet gauge musical ability.

Inclusion

- Inclusion is a strong and developing feature of music at Alcester High School. More pupils from a wider range of backgrounds are involved in

the musical life of the school since the development of the Music College status and the Rock School focus.

- 21% of the school population has instrumental tuition. This is well above the percentage seen in most schools.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that pupils receive appropriate support to improve their standards at Key Stage 3 by consideration of timetable, accommodation and deployment of resources
- developing singing within the curriculum.

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

Clive Kempton HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector