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Mr P Hopkins  
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Dear Mr Hopkins

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme 2006/7 – Music and Religious Education (RE)

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 14 and 15 March 2007 to look at work in Music and RE. At the end of the inspection we fed back our judgements and this letter is to confirm our findings.

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 is 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. In RE, the visit had a particular focus on the implementation and impact of the Norfolk Agreed Syllabus for RE.

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.

## Music

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, observation of five lessons, including some instrumental teaching and three extra-curricular activities. I also appreciated the opportunity to hear your

school concert band, along with some musicians from your partner primary schools at the Corn Exchange on the Tuesday evening before my visit.

The overall effectiveness of music is good with some outstanding features. Music making is a vibrant and exciting feature of school life. High expectations and a commitment to quality characterise its approach. Music makes a distinctive contribution to the community through its public performances.

### Achievement and standards

Overall achievement and standards are good.

- Standards at GCSE have been consistently above average in recent years, and the increasing take-up of the subject in Year 10, is a measure of the popularity and success of the subject. Although some able musicians do not opt for music at GCSE, they continue to participate fully in extra-curricular ensembles. Many students' compositions show creative flair and a good technical understanding of how to use computers to compose.
- Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are realistic and indicate above average standards. The good proportion of students, around one in five in 2006, who reach higher National Curriculum Levels is indicative of the high performance standards reached by some students.
- Students on both the A-level music course and A-level music technology course reach above average standards and make good progress through the course.
- At all levels, students have good composing, performing and listening skills although their ability to make careful and informed evaluations of each other's work is less well developed. In all years, students' use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently to manipulate and structure their musical ideas.
- Standards in some of the extra-curricular ensembles are high. The Concert Band has done consistently well in the National Festival of Music for Youth, and plays with style and control. Singing in the senior choir is largely accurate and expressive and the sixth form boys performed with panache.
- Students speak with pride of their involvement in all musical groups, and music makes a unique and significant contribution to their personal development, particularly their social skills and confidence. The support, for example, provided by older students to their younger colleagues in bands is exemplary. As one parent commented: *"my child would have been a less well-rounded individual were it not for the music department"*. Students participate enthusiastically in the extensive range of musical clubs and the Talent Show offers unparalleled opportunities for hidden talent to be discovered.

## Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is good.

- Much good learning takes place because of the purposeful atmosphere established in lessons. Teaching is confident and expectations are high. Students are encouraged to be creative through the strong focus on developing composing skills. In this regard, learning is very well supported by the teachers' knowledgeable use of ICT. Teacher interventions are effective in keeping students on track and at its best, encourage them to solve problems on their own. In lessons, on-going assessment and feedback is helpful in letting students know how they might improve.
- However, in some lessons, planning does not build on the prior experience and attainment of students. Criteria for assessment are made known, and are useful targets for students of different abilities to aim for, but in some cases, individual students are not being challenged enough. Despite the use of peer assessment, opportunities for discussion and evaluation of each others' work are not always taken, and as a result appraisal skills are relatively weak.

## Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum is well planned and is enriched by an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities and clubs. With over eighteen different ensembles and at least fifty musical and dramatic performances during the year, students of all abilities and experience are very well catered for. ICT is extensively used to support students' composing work, and this sometimes leads to a lack of balance in the range of performing, composing and listening activities, particularly at Key Stage 3.

## Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good.

- The head of department leads with energy. His clear vision and dedication has inspired several generations of students to learn to love music and fully participate in all the activities. The school's good reputation rests partly on the good work of the department. As one parent wrote: *"we are very impressed; everything is handled professionally and passionately"*.
- The department's self-evaluation is accurate and realistic and provides a secure basis for future planning. Monitoring within the department is satisfactory, but has not ensured consistently effective teaching, through the sharing of good practice.

## Subject issues

- Students' academic guidance is good. Individual students are assessed regularly and assessment is used effectively to plan carefully for individual needs.
- The school has effectively used its status as a performing arts college to create fruitful partnerships with both primary and secondary partners. A particular strength is the range of instrumental teaching provided by the school for its partner primary schools, although the school has not developed curricular links to the same extent. However, the management and monitoring of this work is not regular enough to assure quality.

## Inclusion

- The department is committed to the involvement of a good proportion of students in music making. A significant proportion of students (over 400) from all years participate in extra-curricular clubs and activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring more consistently good teaching, by improving planning to ensure individual students' needs are met and by providing more opportunities for students to discuss each other's work
- reviewing the curriculum to ensure an appropriate balance of performing, composing and listening activities
- providing more regular and rigorous monitoring of work provided for partner primary schools to assure quality and standards.

I very much hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in your school.

## Religious Education

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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of RE was judged to be good. However, lack of sufficient provision for the majority of pupils in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form, means the school does not meet in full the requirements of the Norfolk Agreed Syllabus.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement in RE is good.

- Students make good progress from an overall average base at the beginning of Key Stage 3, so that by the end of Year 9 most are working

at levels at least in line with expectations in the Norfolk agreed syllabus, and a few beyond.

- Progress in Key Stage 4 is good for those students following the GCSE full course. Students are well-motivated and very effectively taught and, as a result, GCSE results are usually above the national average. A similar pattern of progress is found in the examination groups in the sixth form.
- In spite of restricted curriculum provision for the majority in Key Stage 4, and lack of clear written evidence of their progress, pupils do progress in the way they explore and evaluate a range of spiritual and moral issues. They have less opportunity to develop their awareness of religious attitudes and teachings which impinge upon those issues.
- Pupils generally show positive attitudes to learning in RE and value the challenge it provides to their thinking and their own personal development.

### Quality of teaching and learning in RE

The quality of teaching and learning is good, with some outstanding features.

- All teaching is built around sound principles, and enhanced by good subject knowledge and understanding, imaginative and challenging activities and careful attention to targeting work to the abilities of pupils.
- A systematic pattern of assessment is being developed to ensure that judgements about pupils' progress are rigorous and accurate. A strong awareness among students of the level at which they are working is a direct reflection of the emphasis on the use of level descriptors in teaching and learning. Students in examination groups know what they need to do to achieve their potential. Written work is marked carefully and supportively.

### Quality of the RE curriculum

The quality of the RE curriculum is satisfactory.

- The provision at Key Stage 3 meets statutory requirements, and provides a relevant and challenging programme. The course provides an effective and balanced learning programme through the study of selected religions and contemporary issues. The school's scheme of work is gradually being brought into line with the requirements and guidance in the Norfolk agreed syllabus.
- The course provided for non-examination students in Key Stage 4 is challenging and strongly focused on the exploration of spiritual and moral issues. Students enjoy, benefit from and value their learning. Its range, however, is limited, and students do not have sufficient opportunity to explore religious beliefs and values in depth. The limited provision does not therefore meet in full the expectations of the Norfolk agreed syllabus, and, consequently, students not taking the GCSE course do not achieve their full potential.

- GCE examination provision in the sixth form is good. The school is exploring ways of providing a more effective range of opportunities for non-examination groups.

## Leadership and management of RE

The leadership and management of RE are good.

- The department is well led by an able and enthusiastic head of subject, who supports and monitors the specialist and non-specialist team effectively. The subject is well planned throughout the school at all levels.
- The department's self evaluation is detailed and wide-ranging, but overly self-critical in terms of the department's qualities. However, the current action plan is focused well, sets out in detail a limited number of targets, and identifies clearly actions to achieve and monitor them.
- The school is well aware of the need to develop a more effective programme for all students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, to ensure they receive their full entitlement and achieve their potential in the subject, and it is working towards resolving this issue.

## Subject issue

Effective steps have been taken to integrate the school's scheme of work in RE with the requirements of the Norfolk agreed syllabus. Particular attention has already been given to mapping the areas of study and chosen religions with those set out in the agreed syllabus, and bringing the levels of learning into line with the relevant level descriptors.

## Inclusion

The department reflects closely the overall school policy for inclusion, particularly in terms of ensuring that all students across the full ability range are supported in their learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- bringing the provision for all students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form into line with the requirements of the Norfolk agreed syllabus for RE
- continuing to develop an effective pattern of assessment in RE to support the use of level descriptors and to target learning.

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

A copy of this feedback will be sent to your local authority and will be available to the next institutional inspection team and will be published on Ofsted's website. In the case of RE a copy will also be sent to the Norfolk Standing Advisory Council for RE.

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