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Dear Mr Gilbert

Ofsted subject inspection programme – Music

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 05 and 06 March 2007 with Robin Hammerton HMI 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 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.

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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work, observation of five whole-class lessons, five individual instrumental or vocal lessons and one extra-curricular activity.

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory overall, while the achievement of younger pupils is good.

- While pupils in Years 8 and 9 make satisfactory progress the standards at the end of Year 9 are below national expectations. Pupils in Year 7 are now making good progress and their standards are in line with national expectations.
- The number of pupils studying music for GCSE is small. Results over the last three years have been below national averages. Pupils in Year 10 make good progress and pupils in Year 11 make satisfactory progress. A small number of less able pupils do not achieve well because the curriculum is not well matched to their needs. Standards in instrumental or vocal lessons and in extra-curricular activities are satisfactory and, in most cases, pupils make good progress.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons are good. They support each other's learning well when given the opportunity to discuss their work. They are interested and motivated by the caring and clear teaching, and are keen to succeed.

Quality of teaching and learning of music

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching is purposeful and relationships with pupils are positive. Most lessons are carefully planned and proceed at a good pace. They are managed effectively to meet clear, if sometimes imprecise, learning objectives. A good range of activities motivate and engage pupils.
- In lessons where learning objectives are not precise enough they are sometimes confused with activities. As a result pupils are less clear about what they are intended to learn as opposed to do.
- Younger pupils are beginning to learn how to assess their work and identify areas for improvement. This helps pupils in Year 7 to make good progress. This development is at an early stage and is less strong with older pupils.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The curriculum has been improved significantly during this school year. Practical work is linked well with theory to make learning relevant and enjoyable. However, pupils in Years 8 and 9 are not working at significantly higher levels than those in Year 7 and the curriculum is similar for each year group. The scheme of work will need further development to meet the needs of pupils as they progress from Year 7. It

is currently insufficiently adapted to suit the needs of individual and groups of pupils of different abilities.

- Opportunities to enhance the basic curriculum are available to pupils. For example, pupils in Year 10 learned to play a gamelan. This experience was drawn on later when studying different scales in the classroom.
- The school provides a satisfactory and improving range of extra-curricular activities, and instrumental and vocal lessons.

Leadership and management of music

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The department has good capacity for improvement.

- There is a sound vision for the future of music in the school. The department has stabilised since the recent appointment of the head of department and the establishment of a faculty which includes music. Good progress has been made in a number of ways including in improving the quality of teaching and learning and in curriculum development. This swift progress demonstrates that there is good capacity for further improvement.
- Departmental self-evaluation has identified accurately the strengths of the department and broad areas for development. However, the subject development plan does not have sufficient detail about timescales, objectives and success criteria which are needed to realise the vision for music.

Subject issues: Data collection and Partnerships

- Information about pupils' interests and experiences on entry to the school is gathered methodically and used to inform planning. Current testing arrangements are rather narrow and not sufficiently sophisticated to ensure that pupils are able to demonstrate the full range of their knowledge, skills and understanding. The department's arrangements for assessing National Curriculum levels are improving but are not fully accurate.
- The school is beginning to establish worthwhile links with a range of partners including local primary schools and nearby secondary schools. The Local Authority is providing good support for the new head of department.

Inclusion

- An equal number of boys and girls are studying music in Years 10 and 11. However the numbers involved are very small and the vast majority of pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form experience no music provision at school.
- There is a gender imbalance in the choice of instruments and related activities. The department has not yet developed a clear strategy to

ensure that individuals and all groups of pupils can access all aspects of provision equally. For example, although a pupil with a disability is included well, this is not the case for another pupil who finds the work difficult.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that learning objectives are sufficiently precise to enable pupils to know what they are expected to learn in each lesson
- ensuring that individual assessments are accurate and shared between staff and pupils so that targets for improvement are clear for each pupil
- aligning the departmental developmental plan more closely with the priorities identified through self-evaluation and sharpen its focus in order to achieve the school's vision for music
- increasing the number of pupils involved in music in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form and ensuring that all groups including boys and girls and those of lower attainment have equal access to all provision.

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

David Williams
Additional Inspector