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Mr R Sherriff  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Sherriff

### Ofsted subject inspection programme – Music

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

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 and observation of lessons, ensembles and instrumental tuition.

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be outstanding.

### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Standards are exceptionally high and have been consistently so for several years. Pupils enter school with musical skills that are overall above average.

By the end of Year 9 skilful teaching has ensured that their standards have been maintained and in many cases improved to well above average, which constitutes good achievement. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 make excellent use of musical vocabulary and enjoy performing in lessons. They have very well developed listening skills and demonstrated a good understanding of the various styles and structures of pop music. Their terrific attitudes to learning are a significant aid to their achievement. Pupils want to work hard, are prepared to give freely of their time and have a real thirst for knowledge. Many are already good musicians having benefited from specialist teaching in their previous school and from visiting instrumental and vocal tutors.

- The larger than average number of pupils that opt to study the GCSE course are accomplished performers. They are well prepared for examination success and build very well on their previous high quality achievements. Consequently, these pupils achieve outstandingly and attain standards that are exceptionally and consistently high. They really enjoy making music and many wish to continue their musical studies beyond school. All are confident independent learners and also possess the skills to work productively in small groups or large ensembles. Their performance skills are particularly strong and are greatly enhanced by the vast array of performance opportunities offered to them.
- Students achieve well in the sixth form when compared to their standards on entry to the course. There is a wide range of musical ability because there is no requirement for students to have studied music at GCSE to be accepted on the music technology course. Students following the A level music course attain high standards because teaching is very secure and ensures students focus relentlessly on the examination requirements.
- Standards of extra-curricular musical groups are exceptionally high. The very large numbers of instrumentalists, many of whom have attained the highest levels of performance in national examinations, contribute significantly to the wide range of high quality ensembles. Pupils make outstanding progress in these groups and they are justifiably proud of their achievements. The performance standards are exceptional and this is reflected in the high quality concerts and the excellent examination results.

### Quality of teaching and learning of music

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Pupils learn well because teachers have high expectations of what pupils can and should do and the pupils have incredibly positive attitudes to working. It is these excellent attitudes that ensure pupils achieve so well. Teaching is good overall with some that is outstanding. Teachers are highly committed musicians and share their subject expertise well with the pupils. Some teachers have excellent working relationships with pupils and this gets the best out of pupils. A relative weakness is that teachers do not always focus enough on how well pupils are learning. Lessons are very well planned but learning objectives are not always shared and the progress made in a lesson is not consistently evaluated. This focus on teaching rather than learning is being addressed at whole school level, but it is too soon to see the impact.

- Assessment procedures have improved since the previous inspection and teachers now have a much more accurate understanding of how well pupils are doing. However, pupils were not always clear of their levels when asked.
- The quality of the instrumental tuition is good and contributes significantly to the success pupils have in examinations. High proportions, particularly of older pupils, have instrumental lessons outside school rather than during the school day.

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

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

- The curriculum is traditional in content but covers a wide range of musical styles that meets the needs of the pupils very well. Schemes of work have recently been revised and now cover the main elements of the programmes of study well. Musically talented pupils are able to take their GCSE examinations a year early and then have the option to continue with other types of courses such as music technology. The curriculum ensures pupils are regularly engaged in musical activities. However, pupils in Key Stage 3 do not use computers enough to manipulate and refine their pieces. Many of the computers are just not up to the job. They are dated and do not have sufficient memory to handle music software. This frustrates pupils and teachers and inhibits the progress of some pupils, particularly in Years 7 and 8.
- Music has a satisfactory impact on those pupils that do not learn an instrument or choose to study music at GCSE level or beyond. They are aware of the high quality of musical activities and share pride in them even though they may not be directly involved. The use of music in other subjects and in school assemblies is not yet sufficiently well developed but is improving.
- A significant strength of the curriculum is the outstanding range of opportunities for pupils to make music together. There are 15 school organised musical ensembles ranging from a barbershop choir to a full symphony orchestra. These activities are highly valued by pupils. They believe that as well as their musical expertise being developed their personal and social development is greatly enhanced from regular performances, trips abroad and residential courses to Myddleton Grange.

### Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are outstanding.

- The subject leader has a clear and accurate view of the strengths and areas for development of the subject. GCSE music results have been consistently high and assessment procedures, a weakness at the last inspection, have improved. Class teaching is effectively monitored but the 16 visiting instrumental teachers are not formally monitored and systems, although recently improved, are not rigorous enough to ensure accountability. Resources and accommodation are adequate but there is a lack of suitable computers with music software. Music contributes well to the emotional and

personal development of pupils through the wide range of opportunities to perform in groups.

- Teachers work exceptionally well as a team; they give their own time freely to ensure the pupils get the best possible musical experience. However, the lack of a designated second in department results in an overburden of responsibility on the head of department and a lack of a suitable contingency plan should she be absent.
- Documentation is of a high standard and used well within the department. The subject leader has a good awareness of the latest national initiatives for music and has attended training courses to keep updated.

## Subject issues

### Data collection

- Links with one particular feeder school are excellent. Teachers work together on a weekly basis and this ensures good continuity from Year 6 to Year 7. Initial information obtained as pupils enter the school from other primary schools is patchy and does not provide a secure basis for evaluation of musical ability. The local music service teachers provide information of some incoming instrumentalists but this is not consistent. Consequently this aspect of the department's work is satisfactory rather than good. Although record keeping systems are good and there is very good recognition of previous work in lesson planning, there are no accurate records kept of pupils' involvement in extra-curricular activities and the progress they make in instrumental lessons.

### Partnerships

- The department has an established successful partnership with one primary school, but little contact with any others. Links with the local authority music service are satisfactory. Links with the visiting instrumental teachers are effective. Unusually, there are more pupils learning instruments privately than through the school.
- The department benefits from very strong support from the School Music Association; a group of supportive parents and teachers who raise funds for music resources and instruments. This partnership works very well and contributes successfully to the musical development of pupils.

### Inclusion

- The curriculum provision and excellent range of high quality extra-curricular activities provide outstanding opportunities for all pupils to extend their musical experiences. The GCSE course is open to all pupils and access to post 16 music technology courses is not restricted to those that have studied GCSE music. The school works hard to ensure all pupils benefit from music within and beyond the school. The wide range of musical events engages pupils extremely well and extends their musical experiences.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the consistency of teaching by ensuring all teachers focus on how well pupils are learning in every lesson
- improving the links with other schools in order to enhance the collection of data on pupils' standards and progress and use it to inform planning
- improving the quality of, and access to, computers with music software so that pupils in Years 7 to 9 can have the opportunity to use music technology to enhance their work.

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

Anthony Briggs  
Additional Inspector