

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



20 March 2007

Mr A Russell
Headteacher
The Beaconsfield School
Wattleton Road
Beaconsfield
Buckinghamshire
HP9 1SJ

Dear Mr Russell

Ofsted subject inspection programme – Music

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit with David Williams, Additional Inspector, on 07 and 08 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 is benefiting from your school's 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 are published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with pupils, staff (including one peripatetic instrumental teacher), the chair of governors and the headteacher of a local partner primary school; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of six whole-class lessons, the school choir and one instrumental lesson.

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be inadequate. However, some higher profile aspects of music, including productions, are good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are inadequate overall, although the achievement of the small number of GCSE pupils is good.

- In Key Stage 3, standards are notably below national expectations, with the gap between pupils' attainment and national expectations widening as they move through each year group. Teachers' assessments of pupils are inaccurate, being much higher than the actual standards reached.
- Music has a low take up at GCSE, compared with most other options. Results fluctuate significantly from year to year but overall standards are broadly average. In 2006, results were above average.
- Standards in school productions and the school choir are good, with pupils performing with confidence and enjoyment. These performances enhance the music department's reputation in the community. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement, both technically and in terms of increasing repertoire.
- GCSE students, and all those taking part in extra curricular activities, gain in self-esteem and confidence through their participation in music. However, at Key Stage 3, appropriate attitudes towards learning and behaviour are not adequately encouraged or achieved.

Quality of teaching and learning of music

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate overall, though it is good in Key Stage 4.

- Teaching at Key Stage 3 is inadequate. Not enough account is taken of the pupils' needs or how they might best learn. Expectations of the pupils are too low and opportunities to assess their own learning are weak. Time is wasted in lessons and pupils' attitudes deteriorate.
- At GCSE, teaching and learning in the small, well motivated, classes are good. Stimulating practical activities contribute to well-paced and structured lessons. In the sixth form, despite some weaknesses, strong teacher subject knowledge ensures music technology is taught satisfactorily within a performing arts course.
- Across all year groups, computer technology is often used without sufficient analysis of whether alternative approaches, such as using acoustic resources, would support the intended learning more efficiently.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work are, overall, soundly structured and appropriately detailed. They do not, however, provide guidance about differentiation or inclusion. At GCSE, the scheme of work is written only in outline form, showing appropriate broad content but not how the skills, concepts and

knowledge are sequenced over time. Nevertheless, pupils view the GCSE curriculum as relevant to them, helping them to achieve suitable grades.

- There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities and instrumental and vocal lessons. Annual productions, such as the recent performance of 'Oliver', are much enjoyed.

Leadership and management of music

The quality of leadership and management is inadequate.

- You and your governing body have a clear vision about how music and the arts should contribute to the school and wider community. Some progress has been made towards achieving this. As yet, however, the impact of the additional finance gained through arts specialist status on the quality of learning in music is small.
- Self-evaluation in music is much too positive in all respects. The relative success of productions and similar prominent events, along with sound GCSE results, has been allowed to mask significant weaknesses. As a result, the departmental improvement plan does not focus with enough rigour on the key priorities of improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising standards, the urgent need for which has not been recognised. There has also been insufficient monitoring of the quality of the whole music provision by senior managers.
- However, despite there being much to do you showed great determination to bring about positive future change.

Subject issues: Data collection and Partnerships

- The school gathers some information about pupils' attainment and musical experience on entry to the school. However, the curriculum and lesson planning are not sufficiently adapted to take account of this.
- Assessments in music are inaccurate at Key Stage 3 and ineffectively used to promote the next steps of learning. At Key Stage 4, pupils are not aware of what criteria they must meet to achieve particular GCSE grades. However, they say they receive helpful verbal feedback, enabling them to improve their work.
- You have developed worthwhile links with local primary schools and a special school. These links tend to focus on supporting others. Links with other organisations, including the local authority (LA) and the Key Stage 3 national strategy, which might support the department in improving and broadening its approach to teaching and learning, are underdeveloped.

Inclusion

- Broadly equal proportions of boys and girls study music for GCSE, though the overall numbers are small. The cast in productions is representative of the school population, with pupils saying the auditions are very fair. The

school does not check thoroughly whether extra-curricular activities and instrumental lessons are taken up by a typical cross-section of pupils.

- Only a minority of pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form experiences significant musical provision in the school.
- Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities are generally enabled to join in lessons appropriately, sometimes with the helpful support of teaching assistants. However, in the lessons observed, these pupils' particular learning needs were not specifically enough addressed.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- significantly improving the quality of teaching and learning at Key Stage 3
- ensuring much more rigorous subject self-evaluation against clearly understood and objective criteria
- improving the leadership and management of the subject and ensuring more systematic monitoring of provision
- increasing the proportion of pupils at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form who engage in musical activities.

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 LA and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
HM Inspector of Schools