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Mr I Colling
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Dear Mr Colling

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 16 - 17 October 2007. At the end of the inspection I fed back my judgements and this letter is to confirm my 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 student is benefiting from your music provision. It also explored the links you have developed with other schools and agencies, such as the local Music Service.

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: discussions with members of staff and students, a meeting with the head of Rock School, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons and a rehearsal of the school orchestra.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. While there are areas of strength, the school is aware that some aspects require further attention. Recent developments, including greatly improved resources and effective monitoring and support procedures, are making a significant difference to the overall provision for music. There is good capacity for further improvement.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Students generally enjoy music, especially playing instruments and singing. They are very appreciative of the range of extra-curricular activities although they would welcome even more opportunities. The school is aware of the need to increase numbers of students involved in these activities, particularly students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- Standards of attainment on entry are below national expectations and students make satisfactory progress in lessons. While students demonstrate good response to the work set, there is insufficient opportunity for them to achieve at the higher levels in Key Stage 3.
- Standards are strongest in Key Stage 4 where students achieve above national averages. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with particular strength in the quality of relationships between the staff and the students.

- There are excellent working relationships between all the music staff and the students. Teachers are seen to be 'firm but fair'. Tasks are well managed and planning is consistent.
- In one particularly effective Key Stage 3 lesson, students were given clear detail about what was expected. Work was modelled excellently by the teacher and by students so that everyone understood what they needed to do to improve their work. As a result, good progress was made by all.
- Some good teaching was also seen in the sixth form when students were challenged to provide their own solutions when using recording equipment.
- However, in other lessons, the learning objectives and assessment sheets were not always sufficiently clear for students to know if they had achieved what was expected. They were also unsure about what they needed to do to provide a better response.
- While some students produced good responses to the work set, there was often insufficient challenge so that it was not possible for students to achieve at the higher levels.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities including an innovative whole day event for the orchestra. However, the scheme of work in Key Stage 3 has insufficient depth and breadth. It does not meet statutory

requirements or enable students to achieve at the higher levels. There is also limited detail about the depth of work expected in the areas of study at Key Stage 4 and post 16.

- There is not enough emphasis on putting music first so that students can learn from experiencing and exploring sound rather than from reading notation. There is not enough opportunity for students to explore in depth the context of music from different cultures, an aspect of learning that students agreed they would find very interesting.
- Music technology is a positive development in the provision post 16. The school is sensibly considering different courses to ensure that they meet the needs and interests of all students.
- Resources have been increased impressively through the introduction of keyboards and computer software in all music rooms. Students welcome these new resources enthusiastically but rightly identify the need for more instruments for classroom performance.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory with good features particularly in the commitment of the music department to improvement and the effective monitoring and development procedures implemented by the senior leadership team.

- You have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the music provision. Good progress has been made recently, bringing in outside specialist expertise to address issues identified by subject monitoring. You are right about the need for continued support.
- The music department works well as a team, sharing responsibilities and supporting each other. For example, several of the music staff performed in the school orchestra led by the woodwind teacher. There is a strong commitment to improvement and the subject leader is fully aware of the areas that need urgent attention and of the need to define more specific targets in the subject action plan.

Subject issues

Data Collection

- Assessment mechanisms are being developed. The process for involving students in self-assessment is starting to work well but further attention is needed to ensure this system works effectively. Data collection overall is inadequate as there is no central information about involvement in extra-curricular activities, this includes taking registers. There is also insufficient audio recording of students' work which is vital to ensure increased progress.

Partnership Links

- Some good links have been developed with outside agencies, for example with Rock School and the music service. These links provide additional extra-curricular opportunities for students.

Inclusion

- Inclusion is satisfactory. Lessons involve all students equally, although the current emphasis on notation disadvantages some students who find it easier to learn aurally. The lack of data on extra-curricular activities makes it difficult to confirm whether or not these activities are inclusive. The school is aware of the need to encourage more boys to play in the school orchestra.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- rewriting the schemes of work for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 to ensure sufficient breadth and depth of study
- refining learning objectives and assessment mechanisms so that students are clear about expectations and how they can improve their work further
- regularly recording students' work to reinforce understanding of expectations and to celebrate success
- collecting and analysing information about take-up of extra-curricular activities to find ways to increase involvement.

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

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

Anthony Knight
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools