

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr M Brett
Headteacher
Durham Gilesgate Sports College and Sixth Form Centre
Bradford Crescent
Durham
DH1 1HN

Dear Mr Brett

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 11 and 12 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 any links you have developed with other schools and agencies.

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, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory.

- Standards in Key Stage 3 are below national expectations. Nevertheless students make satisfactory progress in relation to their prior attainment. The small numbers of students who study music at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form attain the grades expected of them.

- Students make better progress in performing compared to composing and singing. During a keyboard lesson most students performed confidently to their peers and gave each other helpful comments for improvement. These lessons are enjoyed by students and they contribute significantly to raising the confidence and self-esteem of many students.
- Students' GCSE compositions are crafted carefully but lack evidence of creativity because there is little use of musical style and invention. This lack of creativity is also evident in the compositions by those studying in the sixth form where again performing skills are stronger than composing skills.
- Students achieve satisfactorily in the sixth form. 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 courses. Despite this open access, numbers remain relatively low when compared to the size of the student population in the sixth form.
- Currently there are very small numbers of students involved in instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teaching engages students positively in their learning and encourages and supports them well. There is constructive dialogue in lessons which helps students understand how to improve their work. However at times some students are reluctant to express their opinions. Progress is sometimes slower because students let their teachers provide answers for them and show them how to do the planned tasks.
- Good subject knowledge is used well to help students learn. This is especially evident in lessons for sixth form students. On occasions, though, an over-reliance is placed on spoken responses from students when sung or practical response would be more appropriate.
- Lessons are generally well planned with learning objectives clearly shared with students, but they do not always include different levels of challenge for all groups of students. Students, therefore, are sometimes unsure about what they are aiming for in their own music making.
- Students are helped to understand how to improve their work through the use of sequenced statements that are presented as sub-divided levels. This system is still being refined but is used enthusiastically by students.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The overall quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Overall, the curriculum is relevant to students' needs and interests. However, you are aware that there is an urgent need to improve the computer resources. Currently they are very limited and only available for students taking music at GCSE and Advanced Level. The choice of software is also very limited and does not include sequencing programs for use by those students who find traditional notation challenging.
- The curriculum is enhanced by a small number of extra-curricular activities and a small number of students receive instrumental lessons. The school has rightly identified the need to develop these activities further.
- The variety of teaching methods and activities are limited significantly by the accommodation, especially in the sixth form. Overall accommodation for music is inadequate.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory overall.

- The senior leadership team recognise that there is an urgent need to improve the quality of accommodation and resources for music. Support is given to the head of department but to date this has not been sufficiently effective to develop the subject and increase the number of students wanting to study music beyond Year 9. Disappointingly, an insufficient number of students chose music this year, so the school did not feel that an option group was viable.
- The head of department manages the day-to-day running of the department well. Precise priorities for action have been developed as a result of detailed self-evaluation. New strategies are being put into place, for example the method by which students self-assess their progress at the end of lessons and set themselves targets. Overall, there is satisfactory capacity for improvement.

Subject issues: Data Collection and partnerships

- Assessment of students' musical interests and abilities beyond the classroom is a developing area.
- Previous staffing difficulties and constraints of time have meant that links with feeder schools are insufficiently developed. You and the head of department recognise the need for more effective links to be established.
- Early discussions are taking place with a nearby secondary school to explore opportunities for joint provision at Key Stage 4.
- There are effective links with the local authority and good opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) and training.

Inclusion

- The drive for inclusion is central to the philosophy of the school. However, music inclusion is significantly hampered by the lack of equipment and accommodation, which restricts the learning styles and curriculum offered to all students.
- Changes to the music events and performances have resulted in more students being involved. However, the number of older students involved in music both within and beyond the classroom is very small.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the planning of lessons include ways to extend and challenge all students
- taking urgent action to remedy deficiencies in provision for computer and other information technology equipment
- increasing the number of students involved in music in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form and also in instrumental and extra-curricular activities.

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

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector

