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Dear Mrs Fox

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you very much for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 05 - 06 November 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 colleges 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 college 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 members of staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

As we discussed during the inspection and in the feedback meeting, whilst there are strengths, particularly in the work of the school ensembles such as the orchestra, choir, and big band, the overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. This is because of serious issues to do with inclusion and aspects of leadership and management both within the department and at a whole-school level.

Achievement and Standards

Achievement and standards are inadequate. Whilst the standards of participating students are good, significant numbers of other students are excluded from participating and therefore not achieving as well as they could.

- Students join the college at the start of Year 10. Data from high schools shows that 78% of them have achieved Level 5 or above in Key Stage 3, above the national average. However, entry for GCSE examinations has been lower than national averages.
- The students who took the GCSE music exam in 2007 worked to a good standard and made satisfactory progress. However, these results were masked by the fact that a significant number were not entered for the GCSE exam because it was felt that they did not have the skills to achieve at this level. Instead, they were entered for an entry level qualification, designed for students who had attained below Level 3 in Key Stage 3. Other results for these students show that this was not an appropriate course for them to be taking, and this represents significant underachievement.
- Very small numbers of students choose to continue music A level in the sixth form, and these numbers are decreasing. However, those who do take the course work to a good standard and make satisfactory progress. In the music technology course standards are also good and progress is satisfactory. However, the school has placed a limit of 8 places a year on this course. This has resulted in a significant number of students being excluded from the subject. Students who do not gain one of the places have to make alternative course choices or find an alternative provider for music technology education. Given the distances involved in travelling to an alternative provider this is an unsatisfactory arrangement.
- The school ensembles perform to a high standard. Students who play in these groups benefit greatly, both in terms of their musical progress and in their personal and social development. Members of the orchestra talk warmly about the great community spirit in rehearsals and performances. However, there are not enough opportunities for students who play at a lower level than the standard required for these ensembles. There is an annual "Battle of The Bands", but rock and pop musicians are given far fewer opportunities to develop and perform out of lesson time than students who perform in other styles.
- Just under 3% of students at the college receives specialist instrumental or vocal tuition at the school, and this is very low compared to other schools. At present, students who learn steel pans at high school are unable to continue as this tuition is not available at the college. Specialist tuition is subsidised for students opting for GCSE or A level music. There is no formal remissions policy to offer support for students in need, although parents are able to apply to the governing body for help on an individual basis.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject skills and knowledge. They have good working relationships with students. Students who participate in school ensembles are particularly appreciative of the time and effort given by their teachers.
- Teaching was satisfactory in nearly all curriculum lessons seen during this inspection, enabling students to make satisfactory progress. Lessons are planned efficiently to ensure that students move progressively through the requirements of their exam courses, and their progress is tracked through useful log sheets. However, there are not enough opportunities for students to contribute to discussions. There is too much teacher-led, whole-class teaching. This means that the more able are sometimes not challenged enough and others struggle to keep up, particularly in more theoretical lessons. Behaviour is always good but students would benefit from being given more responsibility to take the lead.
- The musical direction of ensemble activities is good, with teachers modelling effectively through directing and performing. The standard of musicianship shown and expected by teachers plays an important part in creating the standards achieved by the school ensembles.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- GCSE music is offered in Key Stage 4 and music and music technology A levels are offered in the sixth form. There are no vocational qualifications offered in music or the performing arts.
- There are sound, if rather brief, planning documents for all examination courses that ensure that course requirements are met and that teachers have a clear overview that enables students to pace their work appropriately and meet deadlines efficiently.
- Accommodation for music is cramped and shabby. Despite this, resources are adequate and well-ordered with good housekeeping of instruments, electronic equipment, recordings, and printed resources. The work of school ensembles is rightly celebrated through display, although there is less emphasis given to students' other musical achievements.
- There are highly successful, and nationally recognised, instrumental and vocal ensembles that perform regularly at home and on annual tour to Europe. There is a successful annual musical theatre production. These activities do much for the school's standing in the community. However, there are not enough opportunities to cater for the needs of interests of students who do not meet the standards required by these ensembles, or who perform in other musical styles.

Leadership and management of music

The overall quality of leadership and management is inadequate.

- The department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. However, too much emphasis is placed on extra-curricular activities and not enough attention is given to improving whole-class teaching and learning through the curriculum.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning has not been rigorous enough. Whilst examination results have been analysed and evaluated, there has not been enough consideration made of participation rates, the effect of selection and entry policies, and value-added measures.
- The college has not sufficiently questioned or challenged issues of inclusion, particularly concerning entry at GCSE, uptake at A level, financial support for specialist tuition, and involvement in extra-curricular activities. Whilst the information given to students in high schools does not specifically exclude any groups of students, the impression is given to students and parents that it is highly advantageous to have achieved Grade 3 or equivalent in performance before opting for GCSE music. This discourages some students from taking the course.
- The Director of Music has good knowledge of the students who play in the main school ensembles and who have opted for examination courses; however, no information is collected or knowledge held about other students' musical interests and abilities.

Subject issues: Data collection and partnerships

- High schools students who perform to the required standard, particularly string players, are invited to join the college orchestra. The Director of Music has well-established links with high schools regarding these students. However, whilst the college hosts area meetings of music coordinators, there is very limited connection between the work done by students in the Key Stage 3 music curriculum and curriculum work at the college.
- Traditionally, a register is kept for the orchestra, but no other registers are kept for other ensemble rehearsals and extra-curricular activities. This means that the school cannot monitor the health and safety of students and the participation and progression of individuals or groups of students.
- There are well-established links with the Leicestershire Arts-in-Education service to provide instrumental and vocal tuition for college students. The area music centre is run on the college site on Saturday mornings, and is attended by about 60 students of all ages.

Inclusion

There are serious concerns about inclusion. The Director of Music and the college management team do not do enough to monitor and track the participation, standards, and achievement of all groups of students, or intervene when provision is not good enough. As a result, some students are being excluded and are therefore unable to benefit from the music provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed and agreed, included:

- ensuring that the GCSE music course is made accessible to the full ability range, both through the options selection process and through teaching that caters for the full range of learning needs, and that sixth form music courses are accessible to all suitable students who wish to take them
- encouraging and enabling more students in the college to continue with their music-making outside of timetabled lessons, regardless of whether they are taking a recognised examination course and regardless of their standard or personal circumstances
- keeping regular and full records of students' participation in musical activities, to ensure that students' personal development and care are properly tracked and that the department is able to monitor levels of participation and inclusion.

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

A copy of this feedback will be sent to your local authority, will be available to the next institutional inspection team, and will be published.

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 college. 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

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools