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Mr S Colledge
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Dear Mr Colledge

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 8 - 9 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 pupil 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, including samples of pupils' work, and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. The school provides a curriculum which is taught in a way that is appropriate to the needs of most pupils.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards by the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations and pupils make satisfactory progress. Pupils listen carefully and analytically to music, identifying features which they then draw on in their own composing.
- Standards in GCSE and A level groups are also broadly in line with national expectations. Compositions are fluent and make good use of a wide variety of styles and techniques. Almost all pupils make good use of music software, including notation software, to help them in their work. A small number of pupils under-achieve because they are not able to cope well with this aspect.
- Pupils collaborate well with each other and with teachers. They have positive attitudes and enjoy their work. They feel comfortable in taking responsibility, providing ideas and helping others.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Positive relationships and the effective use of a wide range of styles and genres play a significant part in engaging and motivating most pupils.
- In the best lessons a strong emphasis on critical listening and aural development, coupled with a practical approach to music making, ensures that musical skills are developed effectively.
- Pupils know, in general terms, what they are aiming for in lessons. However, learning objectives are not always clear enough to ensure that pupils know precisely what they are intended to learn in the lesson. As a result, most pupils make satisfactory, rather than good, progress.
- Pupils assess their own and others' work using criteria drawn from national curriculum levels. Insufficient emphasis is given to the significance of the key characteristic of learning in the first sentence of each level. Progression within each level is not presently assessed in terms of pupils' increasing confidence, independence and ownership, as suggested in the national curriculum document for music.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum includes a good range of musical styles and genres with an emphasis on practical music making. The curriculum for pupils studying music at GCSE is also predominantly practical but it does give an emphasis to the use of musical notation. This suits the needs of most pupils, but disadvantages a few who have limited skills with notation. The school

recognises that it should ensure that the curriculum offered is able to meet the needs of all pupils who wish to follow an accredited course in Key Stage 4.

- There is no strategic system for collecting and using information about pupils' musical aptitudes or interests beyond the music classroom. This limits the extent to which the curriculum can be planned to make best use of pupils' skills or to recognise achievement in a wider context.
- Opportunities for performing, including singing, in the classroom are satisfactory. Beyond the classroom there is a good range of opportunities for pupils to perform.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory.

- Music has recently become part of a broader faculty. This is leading to a coherent whole-school approach to arts education and a clear vision for music which recognises the need to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met.
- In most aspects this vision is delivered effectively. For example, the practical approach to music making involves and engages almost all pupils as effective learners.
- There are, however, areas for improvement. These include the more precise identification of what pupils are intended to learn in lessons; the way in which information about pupils' achievements beyond the classroom is used; and the way in which pupils' work is assessed against National Curriculum levels.

Subject issues

Data Collection

- Pupils' attainment on entry in Year 7 is assessed through the use of the initial module. Assessment remains a key feature as pupils' progress through the school and assessments are broadly accurate.
- Information about pupils' attainment, experiences and involvement in music beyond the classroom is not gathered strategically. This limits the extent to which the provision can match pupils' different needs, interests and aptitudes. For example there are relatively few opportunities for pupils to use their instrumental skills in classroom work.

Partnership Links

- The school recognises that the range of partnerships is currently under-developed. Although there are links with other schools, these are limited and have relatively little impact.
- Links with the local music service, which is a private consortium, are valued and felt to be very worthwhile.

Inclusion

- The curriculum provides well for the needs of the significant majority of pupils.
- The school provides a satisfactory range of opportunities for pupils in Key Stage 3, both within and beyond the formal curriculum. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities with especially good take-up by pupils in years 7 and 8. Performance opportunities for pupils involved in music are good.
- Pupils' involvement in extra-curricular activities is reduced as they progress through the school. The department acknowledges that there is the potential to develop a wider range of activities to involve more pupils from Year 9 upwards.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:-

- identifying more clearly and precisely what pupils are intended to learn, as opposed to do, in lessons
- making sure the curriculum matches the needs, interests and aptitudes of all pupils
- increasing the range of opportunities for pupils to be involved in extra-curricular activities
- developing the range of partnerships to enhance provision for pupils and broaden opportunities for professional development for staff.

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

David Williams
Additional Inspector