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07 December 2007

Mrs L Duncan
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Duncan

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 3-4 December 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, scrutiny of documentation and observation of lessons and some extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory with good features. Considerable progress has been made since the last inspection and there is good capacity for further improvement. Some aspects are less well developed but the school is giving good attention to ensuring greater consistency in the quality of provision.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory with some good aspects, particularly in the involvement of selected students in additional timetabled sessions where they benefit from the opportunity to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem.

- Students generally enjoy class music lessons and make satisfactory progress overall. They make good progress in some tasks but there are insufficient opportunities for them to achieve the higher levels in Key Stage 3.
- While the percentages taking GCSE music are still below the national averages, the increasing numbers of students taking GCSE make good progress and achieve well at the end of the course.
- The behaviour of students is good in all lessons and there are good opportunities for older students to support the work of younger students - for example, in the drum ensemble and the additional curriculum opportunities for selected students in Years 7 and 8.
- The number of students involved in the extra-curricular activities and instrumental lessons is increasing and are particularly strong in Year 9. The performance by a rock group of boys in Years 9 and 10 was excellent. The school is aware of the need to encourage and enable more Year 7 and Year 8 students to get involved.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with good features particularly in the positive working relationships that have been developed.

- Lessons are planned well and assessment is linked effectively to the expected outcomes. There are clear assessment criteria which are used well by teachers and pupils. However, these criteria do not always reflect the breadth and depth of musical response defined in the National Curriculum levels.
- Work is recorded regularly and students enjoy discussing and assessing their work. Students have also welcomed the increased emphasis on practical music making.
- Good questioning challenges and extends students' responses. Good use is also made of the well developed skills of students as, for example, when a boy demonstrated musical devices on the guitar. However, there is some inconsistency in the quality of teaching, For example, some tasks did not allow enough time for students to make sufficient progress and, on occasions, insufficient attention was given to helping students develop their musical skills.
- Extra-curricular activities are organised and led well.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- There are well planned schemes of work which provide good breadth and clear detail about the work to be completed. The school recognises that the next step is to review the curriculum to ensure sufficient depth of study so that students can be helped to access the higher levels in Key Stage 3. Not enough attention is given to the first statement in each of the National Curriculum levels.
- Students are pleased with the improving musical resources and are right in wanting to always have their music lessons in a specialist room. Good use is made of the keyboards, electric guitars and computers when these are available.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular experiences and there are excellent plans to extend these further. There are also good plans to explore additional courses of study in Key Stage 4.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- You have a clear vision for music and have given excellent support to the development of this subject. Significant progress has been made over the last two years and everything is now in place for further improvement.
- The music department is led well by the enthusiastic and committed subject leader. Good use has been made of whole school initiatives such as the setting up of simple but effective assessment mechanisms.
- There is good monitoring of music which recognises the need for greater consistency in the quality of teaching. The school is aware of the need to ensure good practice is shared more systematically within the music team.
- The selection of students for additional musical experiences is excellent. Good thought is being given to developing this approach further, for example, through providing opportunities for these students to gain even more personal development through performing to others.

Subject issues

Data Collection

- There is good collection of students' progress in the areas of work being studied. Assessment has integrity as the school has clear understanding about progression within these areas. However, some aspects of the expectations in Key Stage 3 levels of attainment are not yet included.

Partnership Links

- Partnerships are at an early stage of development. However, there are good plans for increasing links with feeder primary schools and other secondary schools.

Inclusion

- Lessons and extra-curricular opportunities are inclusive. However, the school needs more analysis of take-up before it can confirm that all different groups of pupils are being involved equally.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving consistency in the quality of teaching by sharing good practice more systematically
- increasing the depth of study of music from different cultures in the Key Stage 3 curriculum so that students can achieve at the higher levels
- finding ways to encourage more younger students to get involved in the 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

Anthony Knight
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools