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Mr I Hobson
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Dear Mr Hobson/Mr Bambridge

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 31 January and 01 February 2008. 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, staff from partner schools, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. Students enjoy their music making and although standards are below national expectations, students make satisfactory progress. Good support is provided for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. The school is rightly working on improving the use of assessment information to plan work that will help students make even better progress.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- The standard of students' work on entry to the school is below national expectations. They make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3 although standards at the end of Year 9 remain below expectations. Students compose and perform simple pieces and understand the structure of contemporary popular songs. However they use a limited range of musical techniques and devices in their music making.
- A small number of students took the GCSE examination in music in 2007. Results were below national averages but students achieved better in music than in their other subjects. Students in Key Stage 4 now have the option of following a BTEC course in performing arts. Most are focusing on aspects other than music, although some study a unit on music theatre.
- Students have positive attitudes to their work. They collaborate well in groups to discuss their work and try out different ideas. Some students lack confidence in making decisions about their work, for example, in deciding whether the music they are creating is suitable for its intended purpose.
- Relatively few pupils, most of whom are in Years 7 and 8, have specialist instrumental or vocal lessons. A larger proportion takes part in extra-curricular activities including whole-school performances of musicals.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Relationships between students and adults are good. This, combined with a good focus on practical work, helps to establish a positive atmosphere for learning.
- The musical resources and repertoire used interest and engage students, so that they see their music making as relevant. For example students in Year 9 in the Language and Dyslexia unit were motivated by work involving contemporary popular music.
- Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are very well supported by teachers and learning support assistants and they play a full part in music lessons.
- The subject leader has identified that assessment is not yet used effectively to help students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. This is partly because while students know what are to do in lessons they are not as clear about what they are to learn.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is well balanced and varied. Musical resources and repertoire are well matched to students' needs and interests. Music makes a good contribution to the whole school focus on improving the provision for cultural diversity.
- In Years 7 and 8, music is planned and taught as part a project or themed approach to learning, involving a range of other subjects. This places students' learning in music within a wider context. For example, Indian music is taught as part of the wider study of Sikhism and Chinese music within the study of current developments in China.
- Curriculum planning seeks to identify what students are intended to learn and achieve. In some cases learning objectives are not precise enough or focus too much on what students will do rather than learn.
- The school offers a good range of instrumental and vocal tuition although take-up is relatively small. A satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities, including whole school productions, is enhanced by other opportunities, such as that for involvement in an African music and dance project. The school has identified the need to broaden the range of activities in order to involve more students.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory.

- The school has identified appropriate areas for development in music. These include developing effective links with the school's Federation partner school. This development is at an early stage. Initial plans to increase opportunities for students have been formulated but not yet implemented.
- The school is also re-evaluating its provision in music beyond the classroom to provide opportunities for more students throughout the school to be involved in activities that match their needs and interests. The management of the school's share of the Music Standards Fund has recently been devolved to the subject leader. The flexibility this provides will help to facilitate further development.

Subject issue: Partnership Links

- The school has developed good partnership links. As part of the Federation, both schools have worked together to identify ways in which collaborative work could provide additional opportunities outside the classroom for students to be involved in musical activities which match their needs and interests. Links also exist with cluster primary schools.

Students on the BTEC Performing Arts course visit primary schools to perform work they have created as part of their course.

- Students benefit from other partnerships such as the District Council's funding of workshops on African music and dance. Links with Community Education and the Youth Opportunities Fund have increased resources and involvement in a range of activities including rock bands and DJing.

Inclusion

- The curriculum is accessible to all students in Key Stage 3, including students in the Language and Dyslexia unit. In Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form there is no specific music provision although some students study a music theatre unit in the BTEC Performing Arts course.
- Instrumental and vocal teaching and extra-curricular activities provide additional opportunities for students, although take-up for some of these activities is relatively small. The school has identified that it needs to improve its provision of extra-curricular activities to meet the needs and interests of more students throughout the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that learning intentions are sufficiently detailed and precise to enable students to know what they are expected to learn in each lesson
- relating assessment criteria more directly to learning objectives so that students and teachers are able to evaluate the progress being made
- increasing the number of students throughout the school who are involved in music activities through, for example, the development of further effective partnerships within and beyond the Federation.

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