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Mr R Brown
Principal
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Dear Mr Brown

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on the 04-05 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 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.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. While you and the subject leader recognise that there is more to be done, strengths are evident in the way music is led and managed and also through the good partnerships links established with your feeder primary schools.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory.

- Standards by the end of Year 9 are below national expectations and students make satisfactory progress as they join the school with broadly average attainment. Students are able to recognise and demonstrate their understanding of musical elements within their compositions. They are able to use computer programs confidently to compose pieces with a clear structure and balance of instrumental parts.
- The tracking of the Year 11 students indicates that more of them than previously are on course to reach their expected target. This is an improving picture. During the three preceding years, the performance of students in their expressive arts course was disappointing and standards overall declined.
- Where work challenges students they make good progress in lessons and their self-confidence is effectively developed. However a lack of challenge, especially for the more able, in some lessons, results in slow progress and students become disaffected.
- Students collaborate well with each other and their teachers. They enjoy performing especially those who are able to perform at venues beyond the college.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Lessons are usually planned carefully and learning is linked sometimes to other creative arts. Performing is an important part of learning. Where class management is secure then students learn well from each other and are encouraged to make connections between different musical styles.
- Positive relationships and encouragement from teachers help keep students on task. Constructive dialogue in lessons often enables students to understand how to improve their work. Nevertheless, at times, teachers' expectations are not high enough, especially during practical work, and as a result students do not learn how to rehearse and improve their work.
- Teachers assess students' work regularly and students are given targets to help them improve their work. Peer assessment is a regular part of learning and is developing students' ability to evaluate the work of others.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9 is enhanced by workshops from visiting specialists. The scheme of work clearly indicates how students' musical skills, knowledge and understanding are developed systematically. A review is about to be undertaken to reflect curriculum changes planned for September 2008.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 follow an expressive arts GCSE course. Recent results have prompted staff to consider whether this is the best option for all students, especially those who struggle to work independently.
- At present only a small proportion of students are having instrumental lessons and enrichment activities are limited. However, music is beginning to play a more important role within the wider school community. The school has rightly identified the need to develop these activities further and to involve more students in music making.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory with good features particularly in the quality of established links with feeder primary schools. There are also emerging strengths, such as the closer monitoring of teaching, that indicate good capacity for further improvement.

- The subject leader provides energy and drive for the department. Future planning is beginning to build on national initiatives such as the development of instrumental/vocal programmes in Key Stage 2. However, developments associated with the Key Stage 3 strategy for music are not yet embedded into the curriculum.
- Appropriate strategies for improvement have been identified. An analysis of the under-achievement of students in Year 11 has been undertaken and as a result, closer monitoring of their progress is now in place.
- Suitable monitoring of the subject is now being undertaken at all levels to ensure that all students make the progress that is expected of them and receive similar musical experiences.

Subject issues:

Data Collection

- Information about students' attainment, experiences and involvement in music beyond the classroom is starting to be collected. This enables provision, both in the curriculum and extra-curricular activities, to match students' different needs, interests and aptitudes.

Partnership Links

- The established links with feeder primary schools enable students' prior learning to be known and built upon when they arrive in Year 7. There are good plans in place for a unit of work to be shared and taught during the summer term. The very positive feedback from the pupils involved last year is testament to the way the school welcomes new students and quickly makes music fun for them.
- Links with the local music service give music staff opportunities to explore and consider new initiatives for music and how they can be incorporated into their lessons.

Inclusion

- The department aims to be an inclusive department where all students are valued. The classroom curriculum for Years 7 to 9 provides well for the needs of the significant majority of students but the absence of a range of extra-curricular activities limits opportunities for students to become involved in other aspects of music making.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing sufficient challenge in all lessons especially for the more able students
- involving more students in music making through an increased range of ensembles
- considering the implementation of other music courses for students in Years 10 and 11 which will build upon more effectively the curriculum offered in Years 7 to 9.

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