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Mr G Barton  
Headteacher  
King Edward VI Church of England Voluntary Controlled Upper School  
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Dear Mr Barton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff when myself and Anthony Knight visited the school on 19 - 20 February 2008 to look at work in science and music.

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. 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 staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of parts of lessons.

Science

The overall effectiveness of science was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Overall standards are well above the national average and achievement is good.

- Students are making good progress in science. This is clear from the scrutiny of students' work and observation of their responses in lessons.
- There has been some reduction in students' achievement at the end Year 9 from being outstanding in 2005, when the school was in the top 2% nationally for science. In 2007 students' achievement had declined to below the top 10%.
- By the end of Year 9 students are performing best in science compared with the other core subjects of mathematics and English.

- At GCSE students' standards are significantly above the national average with nearly four out of five students being awarded grades A\* to C in science.
- Post-16 students are attaining A Level grades at well above the national average.
- Students show good attitudes to learning overall, but in some lessons the pace was not demanding enough to keep students fully engaged.
- Students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. They give very positive views of the assessment systems in place and how it helps their learning.

### Quality of teaching and learning of science

The overall quality of teaching and learning in science is good.

- All lessons observed were at least satisfactory with most being good or better.
- Lessons are well planned and are supported by a detailed scheme of work for each subject that has been produced by good collaboration of the teaching staff.
- Students experience a wide range of learning activities and they value the opportunity to study relevant science and to discuss science issues.
- Assessment arrangements are secure and systematic, resulting in performance data that are accessible to all teachers and which are interrogated thoroughly to check on progress.
- Students have very positive views of the quality of teaching they receive in science. All students interviewed rated teaching as at least good; half of those following GCSE courses and three quarters of those following A Level courses believe teaching to be outstanding.
- Students are less positive about the minority of lessons where the pace is less demanding and where they experience fewer opportunities for independent thinking and learning.
- The level of enjoyment experienced by students seems to increase with their age. They describe involvement in scientific enquiry as one of the major attractions of the subject.
- The quality and quantity of marking varies with the best practice involving students in reflecting on their standards through teachers' written formative comment.

### Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The way that science subjects are taught by specialists is a key strength.
- Students in Year 9, their first year in the school, follow courses in separate sciences. This helps them to consolidate previous learning.
- Year 9 provides good preparation for the National Tests at the end of the year 9 and is a good 'launch pad' for GCSE and pathways for students aged 14-19.

- There is a good range of courses in Year 10 and 11 that meets the needs of all students. Students describe positively the help and guidance they receive in choosing courses.
- At A level the choice in science is limited to the three sciences, physics, chemistry and biology, and no applied science course is offered.
- There is good curriculum enrichment and a range of activities such as CREST awards, science club and visits to sites of scientific interest out of school.

## Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management in science are good.

- Science is managed in the context of a school where accountability is clear and there is strong senior leadership involvement and support.
- The combination of self-evaluation by the science team, and the thorough departmental review carried out by the school leadership, provides a strong basis for further rational development.
- The self-evaluation of science carried out in the school is accurate and involves thorough data analysis.
- There is a high quality, and still developing, tracking and assessment system that underpins the efforts of teachers to promote learning.
- The science department is very well run on a day-to-day basis and teachers feel well supported and led.
- There are high levels of collaboration of teachers in developing the curriculum, producing schemes of work and generating good quality learning materials.
- The subject based leadership structure matches the curriculum structure well and promotes good specialist subject provision.

## Inclusion

Provision for inclusion is good.

- In all lessons observed there was no evidence of teachers treating different groups of students in such a way that they were disadvantaged.
- The performance data of students shows no significant differences of different groups.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring greater consistency in marking of students' work to give them feedback on their successes and what they need to do to improve
- raising the expectation of all teachers such that there is a consistently good or better pace in lessons, and that all students are challenged to work to the best of their ability.

## Music

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

### Achievement & standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Students really enjoy music and comment that 'it is one of the best subjects'. They all feel valued as musicians which represents significant achievement.
- Attainment is good throughout the school. Students are making increasing progress in the one year of Key Stage 3 as more depth of study is being added. Students who continue with music lessons in Key Stage 4 build on their previous learning and achieve well by the end of the course. This good progress is continued through the sixth form.
- The number of students taking GCSE music is above the national average and was particularly high in 2007 when 50 students took this qualification. The percentage of students continuing their study of music in the sixth form is good and again was particularly strong in 2007.
- Good numbers of students are involved in the wide range of instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities. Standards of performance in these groups are high and benefit from the positive support given by sixth form students. One student demonstrated impressive contribution to the school through the excellent leadership of one of these groups.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Students are right in giving extremely high praise for the quality of support and the enthusiasm of the music staff. Relationships are excellent and students respond well to the tasks set.
- The increasing emphasis on relating music to its context is helping students access the higher levels in Key Stage 3. Teachers make skilful reference to features of musical style, and how and why these have evolved. The class performance at the end of one lesson not only showed clear understanding of these features but also a strong sense of achievement and enjoyment by every student in the class.
- All teachers have excellent subject knowledge as seen, for example, in the teaching of lessons in the sixth form. Students are constantly challenged and helped to improve their work.
- Lessons are planned well but learning objectives do not always define the specific skills and understanding to be developed or give clear enough guidance on how the standard of the work could be improved further.
- Students have a secure understanding of the progress they are making but rightly asked for more information about their levels of attainment in Key Stage 3.
- Extra-curricular activities are led effectively with energy and enthusiasm. This includes the excellent activity led by one of the students.

## Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The overall quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum for Key Stage 3 is being developed with impressive depth of evaluation. The content and focus of the lessons are benefiting from effective application of the Key Stage 3 Strategy for Music.
- Tasks are planned well across the key stages but some opportunities are missed to make links between the different activities in the lesson. For example, taking the register could be used to develop musical skills and common learning objectives, such as understanding musical interpretation, could be developed through different activities in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The school recognises that the exploration of links with other subjects is at an early stage of development.
- Sensible thought is being given to finding ways to further increase the number continuing study in Key Stage 4, such as investigating other possible courses that would provide different learning opportunities.
- Classroom resources are fairly limited and the school is giving appropriate attention to improving these, such as the recent purchase of computer equipment. There is an urgent need for better quality of sound reproduction in one of the music rooms and for the learning environment to be improved through better displays.
- The development of the lesson length to 100 minutes is an excellent example of innovative thinking about the curriculum. Students welcome this change saying that it means they can learn and remember much more through the extended sessions. However, as the 100 minute lesson occurs only once every two weeks, the school is right in keeping a close watch on this change to ensure that musical skills that need regular development do not suffer.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities which are much appreciated by the students.

## Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- The quality of self-evaluation and the commitment to further improvement are excellent. In particular, the refreshing consideration of not just 'what' is taught but also 'why' is enabling the music team to be at the cutting edge of musical developments.
- There is a clear vision for music for all and this is being seen increasingly in Key Stage 3 where all students gain fulfilment from performance. The subject leader is giving attention to finding ways to enable students to gain the same sense of achievement from composing.
- The school has started to use music to support the development of students with particular needs. For example, one boy is being given extra sessions using music technology to help increase his self-confidence. The school is right to look for ways to increase performance opportunities for all students.
- Through making careful appointments the school has created a very strong music team which includes specialist part-time staff.

Subject issue: Partnership Links

- There are good links with the music service, the cathedral, and local and national musical venues.

Inclusion

- Inclusion is excellent in Key Stage 3. There is also good inclusion in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The school is collecting information about involvement in musical activities to ensure there is equal access for all groups.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- refining and simplifying the learning objectives so students are always clear how they can improve the depth and quality of their musical responses
- using these objectives to build more links between activities and to increasingly develop effective links with other subjects improving the learning environment through use of more interesting visual displays, better quality sound equipment and increased range of classroom instruments, including information and communication technology (ICT).

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop science and music in the 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Ian Richardson  
Her Majesty's Inspector