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Ms J Dyer
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Dear Ms Dyer

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 25-26 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 students, members of school staff and staff from the local music support service, scrutiny of relevant documentation, and observation of extra-curricular activities and music lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory with good features. This is a large school, where a significant proportion of the students enjoy music greatly. This is shown through their strong commitment to, and good levels of participation in, extra-curricular work, particularly productions involving music and drama. The impact of music on students' personal development is considerable, particularly for those who become fully involved in all the school has to offer. Music lessons occasionally include too much emphasis upon notation skills, and opportunities for students to engage in practical activities are sometimes limited. Music technology software is also largely geared

towards staff notation. Nevertheless, music staff have a clear vision for development of the subject within the school, and there is good capacity for further improvement.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Although a minority of students demonstrate exceptionally high levels of musical competence the majority make satisfactory progress given their standards of attainment on entry to the school.

- Students enjoy music lessons and all make at least satisfactory progress. Many, especially the most able, make good progress. Students with learning difficulties and those with disabilities make at least satisfactory progress as a result of the tailored support provided.
- Standards by the end of Year 9 are broadly average. GCSE results are typically just above average, with a slightly higher than average proportion of students gaining grade A* or A.
- Students show a genuine readiness to engage positively with a good variety of musical genres and traditions.
- Outcomes for students, in terms of the impact of music on their personal development, are good. Students speak openly about how participation in musical activities has had a very positive impact on their confidence and self esteem. A particularly strong feature is students' attitudes towards giving and receiving peer feedback; they clearly appreciate the value of constructive criticism and support in improving their musical work.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes during music lessons and rehearsals is at least good, and occasionally excellent. For example, the maturity and self-control demonstrated by students taking part in a Gamelan workshop was exemplary.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Students feel that the work is relevant, and expectations are generally high.

- Music staff have established good relationships with students and take care to provide an effective working environment.
- The most able students are identified and often asked to demonstrate practical skills, although opportunities for them to play instruments other than keyboards as part of curriculum lessons are limited. Less able students are well supported.
- Procedures for assessment are satisfactory. Students are encouraged to evaluate their own work and that of others.
- Although lessons typically include opportunities for practical music making, these are sometimes limited. There is often too much emphasis on staff notation without sufficient development of aural skills so that students can sometimes find it difficult to relate the symbol to the sound it represents.

- Use of information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory. A good feature of this is that music software is regularly used by Key Stage 3 students. However, software is used mainly for notation purposes, and the wider use of music technology, particularly for creative purposes, is limited.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The overall quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. Provision for extra-curricular music is good, and many students are keen to become involved in a range of groups and ensembles.

- The music curriculum meets all statutory requirements and includes a wide variety of topics reflecting a range of musical styles and genres.
- Schemes of work reflect progression in terms of developing musical skills, but there are currently insufficient opportunities for students to use a range of vocal and instrumental skills during lessons. The creative use of music technology is also underdeveloped.
- There are firm plans to introduce an additional programme of study at Key Stage 4 with the intention of widening participation for students wishing to follow an accredited course in music.
- Extra-curricular activities are well attended. School productions involving music and drama are particularly popular with students. The involvement of staff and students in such projects helps to consolidate the sense of community within the school.
- The school recognises that there is further potential for the development of extra-curricular opportunities, particularly for students who are not competent in the use of staff notation. For example, future work on steel pans is being considered, as is the formation of a samba band.
- The school's specialist status as a language college has impacted positively upon music provision, as shown by a music and drama production performed in French.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good. Music staff are clearly dedicated to their work in the school. There have been a number of recent improvements in music provision, and whilst some developments have yet to impact fully upon standards and achievement, early indications are very positive.

- Self-evaluation shows a good awareness of strengths and areas for development, and action planning is of good quality. School managers and music staff share a clear vision of priorities in developing music further within the school.
- Music staff and the senior management team are strongly committed to developing and extending musical work, based on a good

understanding of the ways in which music can enhance students' experience both in and out of school

- Good support for the music department is now provided through the faculty structure.
- Music staff are flexible in their approach, and very willing to consider new ideas in developing the provision.

Subject issue: Partnership Links

- There are some encouraging developments in the school's work with outside agencies; for example, the excellent Gamelan workshops, run in school by the local music service.
- Music service staff make a significant contribution to the musical work of the school, not just through delivery of instrumental lessons, but also by running various groups and ensembles. Students enjoy contributing to activities run by the local music service, and benefit from this involvement.

Inclusion

- There is a strong commitment to inclusion, based on the principle that music should be accessible by all students.
- All students are invited to join in school productions, and many students benefit greatly from their involvement. Instrumental lessons are offered to all those who wish to become involved.
- Access to GCSE music is open to all, and the school is keen to extend opportunities at Key Stage 4 through the provision of an additional accredited programme of study.
- Staff recognise the significant contribution music can make in enhancing the lives of particular students, particularly those with learning difficulties and disabilities. The progress made by such students is carefully tracked.
- The high profile of notation-based skills, evident in lessons, can present a barrier to some students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing opportunities for practical music making within lessons, particularly activities which develop aural skills and are not largely dependant upon skills in reading notation
- extending the use of ICT for creative work.

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

Julie Price Grimshaw
Additional Inspector