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Mr D Ainsworth  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Ainsworth

### Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you very much for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 04 - 05 March 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: interviews with members of staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music at Trinity is good. A key strength is the part that music plays in creating and maintaining the school's positive sense of community. The school choirs play an important part in everyday school life, although more could be done to encourage more boys to participate in these groups.

## Achievement and Standards

Achievement and standards are good overall.

- Students join the school from many primary schools with a very wide range of musical abilities and experiences. Students make good progress and achieve above average standards at the end of Key Stage 3. Students continue to make good progress overall in Key Stage 4. Over the past three years, standards at GCSE have been above average, although they were below average in 2007. Students in the new BTEC course are making satisfactory progress.
- The number of students opting for music in Key Stage 4 has increased and is now well above the national average. Numbers have increased partly because of the introduction of the new vocational course, but more students have also opted for the traditional GCSE music course.
- There is significant success in involving students from all backgrounds in the additional instrumental and vocal tuition and in extra-curricular activities. This involvement of the school's diverse community is a real strength. Music plays an extremely important part in creating and maintaining the excellent community cohesion of your school.
- There is a strong tradition of choral performance and the senior choir performs to an exceptionally high standard. However, many more girls than boys sing in these choirs.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have good musical expertise. Lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives. Active practical music-making activities are at the heart of all lessons and teachers provide confident musical role models. In the best lessons, teachers use extremely effective questioning to help students understand what they need to do to improve their work. For example, in one very successful lesson the teacher improved the quality of a student's improvisations not by pointing out that the wrong pentatonic scale had been used, but by skilfully asking questions of the student and the class that required them to listen carefully to the performance and find the solution for themselves.
- Ensembles are well led, with clear direction and good attention to musical detail.
- In Key Stage 3, notation is used well in most lessons to support aural and performance work rather than being taught as an isolated skill. The department has increased opportunities for practical work in Key Stage 3 and this has had a positive impact on musical participation and enjoyment in most lessons. However, there are still a few lessons where understanding complex notation is a prerequisite to success and this presents barriers to some students' learning.

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

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

- Teaching rooms for music are not spacious or ideally designed for group or large class practical work. However, they are well-resourced and teaching Key Stage 3 groups in half classes of 15 students helps to alleviate this disadvantage.
- Whilst the Key Stage 3 course meets all curriculum requirements for breadth, there is relatively limited coverage of musical styles and traditions from around the world. This is particularly surprising given the rich resources and backgrounds of the school's community.
- There is a broad long-term plan for the GCSE Music course which is supplemented by printed resources. Similarly, the new BTEC course uses the resource planning pack produced by the awarding body. However, there is insufficient detail in the medium-term planning for both courses.
- Regular school concerts give opportunities for all groups to perform. There is a good range of instrumental lessons including balalaika. A similar wide range of extra-curricular activities includes thriving steel pan groups.

## Leadership and management of music

The overall quality of leadership and management are good.

- There is a clear vision for music with a particularly strong emphasis on inclusion and high standards of public performance. Whilst this vision has led to good involvement and good progress for students from all ethnic backgrounds there has been less success with the involvement of boys, particularly in singing.
- All teachers have regular professional development and have a good awareness of national initiatives. The Head of Music gives particularly good leadership by modelling good teaching practice.
- Although the department knows itself well, lesson observations by senior managers have focussed on generic teaching skills and have given much less consideration to music-specific issues. However, effective support has been given when it has been required, leading to improvements in teaching and learning.

## Subject issues: Data collection and partnerships

- Assessment is regular, efficient, has integrity and effectively tracks students' progress to identify where intervention and support is needed. Regular registers are kept for all lessons and rehearsals.
- The instrumental and vocal teaching programme, mainly staffed by teachers from the Music Service, is very well managed. These teachers also assist with coaching and directing instrumental ensembles.

- The new BTEC course is taught jointly by the Head of Music and a teacher from the Music Service, making good use of specialist knowledge and the Music Service's computer resources. Good use is also made of the computer resources of the local City Learning Centre, which shares a site with the school.
- There are particularly good links with the Northern Chamber Orchestra (NCO). Over the past four years you have participated in a joint composition project with the NCO and a local independent school, with funding from the Department for Children, Schools and Families. This project has included residencies by orchestral players, GCSE students' compositions played by professional musicians, choral and orchestral performances, and opportunities for the most able performers to perform concertos with the orchestra.
- Annual concerts are held at the Royal Northern College of Music which is in close proximity to the school.

### Inclusion

- Students with learning disabilities are given appropriate support in curriculum lessons and there is particularly good attention to the needs of the more able. The school works hard to ensure that students from all backgrounds are able to participate in lessons and activities. Whilst registers are taken, more formal monitoring of participation rates in activities would help to promote even greater participation, particularly of boys.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed and agreed, included:

- improving the detail and medium-term planning of Key Stage 4 courses to provide students and teachers with clearer guidance for teaching and learning
- sharing good teaching practice to ensure consistently effective use of musical notation in all Key Stage 3 lessons
- encouraging and enabling greater participation by boys in vocal ensembles to increasingly match the good number and high standards achieved by girls.

I very much hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in your school.

A copy of this feedback will be sent to your local authority, will be available to the next institutional inspection team, and will be published.

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 college. 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

Mark Phillips  
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools