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14 March 2008

Dr B Wratten
Headteacher
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Dear Dr Wratten

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in Music

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 11 March 2008 to look at work in 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: discussions with members of staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

Features of good practice observed

- Students enjoy music and are getting a good deal from the provision. You are right in highlighting the way 'music brings joy' to the school.
- All work is at least good. Students perform and compose with confidence and increasing awareness of musical conventions. The new emphasis on relating music to its context is having a marked positive impact on the quality of students' work and depth of spoken responses.
- Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Students respond really well to the constant challenge set by the music team. For example, in one lesson the teacher said 'that answer is ok for now but it will need to have more detail by the end of the lesson'.
- Students are being encouraged to think outside of their comfort zone and effective use of 'what' and 'how' questions are now being extended into demanding 'why' questions. These higher order questions rarely have one correct answer and require students and teachers to make connections between different aspects of knowledge and areas of musical experience.

- Excellent links are also being made between different tasks and different ways of learning. For example, students' understanding of the characteristics of music from different periods was greatly enhanced through looking at buildings from the same period. This approach offers much for further development with other subjects.
- Effective use is made of pair work which helps to maintain the pace of the lesson and ensure all are fully involved.
- The Key Stage 3 Strategy for Music has been skilfully used by the subject leader who has cleverly summarised the detail in the supporting materials for her work with other schools. Involvement in the strategy has re-energised the work of the music department.
- Assessment procedures are developing well. Most impressive is the way the marking criteria are agreed with students and peer assessment is collated and recorded in their books. The subject leader astutely recognises that 'just saying it is good has little value' and is committed to improving this already good practice further.
- The school provides good support for music. The accommodation has been greatly improved, although students are right in asking for a wider range of instruments and more use of information and communication technology (ICT) in their lessons. Many opportunities are given to students to perform to others and excellent links have been developed with the community.

Areas for development

As we discussed, the provision in the school could be further improved by:

- building on the good assessment procedures by refining the marking criteria to describe the progressive development of not only skills but also the 'bigger picture' of the underlying increasing depth of musical understanding and increasing quality of musical response
- providing more opportunities for students in Key Stage 3 to use ICT and a wider range of instruments in their music lessons.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in the school.

As I explained previously, 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.

Yours sincerely

Tony Knight
Her Majesty's Inspector