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Mr P Lang
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Lang

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 20-21 October 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.

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. The school provides a good range of musical opportunities for students both within and beyond the curriculum. The school has made good progress in developing the curriculum in Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of students. It recognises that it now needs to develop the curriculum in Key Stage 3.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory.

- During Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress and by the end of the key stage their attainment is broadly in line with national expectations, although very few attain the higher levels.
- The proportion of students studying music in Key Stage 4 is slightly lower than the national average but most make good progress and attain well.
- Many students, especially in Key Stage 3, achieve well in a range of other experiences including instrumental or vocal tuition and extra-curricular activities.
- Most students in Key Stage 3 have positive attitudes to their music making although they enjoy and respond better to practical activities than to written work. Students in Key Stage 4 engage very positively with their learning. They work independently, helping and supporting each other when appropriate.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching is good in Key Stage 4 as carefully sequenced tasks enable learning to be progressively reinforced and extended throughout the lesson.
- In Key Stage 3, learning activities are not as well-sequenced and students are not always engaged in musical activities that allow them to develop and demonstrate their musical skills and understanding. For example, while their theoretical knowledge of different compositional techniques is good, they do not always use these techniques effectively and creatively when composing.
- Planning generally selects well-chosen activities and outlines the broad aims of lessons. However, it does not always identify precisely and clearly what students are intended to learn, as opposed to do, in lessons. As a result many are not able to measure their own progress or identify what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The school's recent priority has been to ensure that the overall curriculum in Key Stage 4 meets students' needs. As part of this process the Key Stage 4 music course has been changed appropriately. However, as yet, there has not been an increase in the numbers studying music in Key Stage 4.

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 has rightly been identified by the school as the next priority for development. The subject leader has begun to adapt the scheme of work to meet new national requirements. The school recognises the need to also take account of national initiatives and strategies in music that would helpfully contribute to this process.
- The curriculum is enhanced through a good range of other activities. These include whole-school musicals, extra-curricular activities and performances and a good range of instrumental and vocal tuition. The school provides a wide range of worthwhile opportunities for students to perform in public. The school is also responding well to students' needs through broadening the scope of its extra-curricular activities. For example, students are involved in activities such as DJing and, through links with higher education and other organisations, they learn about the commercial aspects of music.
- The school has effective links with the local authority music service and other external agencies. It also makes good contributions to supporting music provision in local primary schools.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory. The school has good capacity for improvement.

- Over recent years the school's priority to improve provision in Key Stage 4 has led to good provision for the students involved. The school recognises that greater emphasis should now be placed on further developing provision in Key Stage 3. The imminent move into refurbished accommodation for music will support these developments.
- The school has a clear commitment to broadening and extending provision. This is seen, for example, in increased opportunities and positive encouragement for large numbers of students to be involved in activities such as vocal or instrumental tuition.
- The department has made good progress, as part of a whole school initiative, in establishing a robust and secure system for assessing and recording students' progress.
- The department is small and the school is aware of the importance of providing additional support and opportunities for professional development, especially in relation to developing the curriculum in Key Stage 3.

Subject issue: Inclusion

- The school's aims for music are firmly based on the belief that music should be accessible to all students. The increased availability and active promotion of instrumental and vocal tuition and the modification of the curriculum in Key Stage 4 are examples of how its aims are being met.
- The ways in which the school supports the involvement of all students are supported by the information that is collected about their involvement,

interests and achievements in music. On-going records are kept of the progress made by students in music lessons and used to measure progress against their targets.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that students understand what they need to do to improve their work
- reviewing and refining schemes of work for Key Stage 3 to take account of new National Curriculum orders and other national initiatives
- providing professional development opportunities and dialogue with other practitioners to support the development of the curriculum in Key Stage 3.

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

David Williams
Additional Inspector