

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs C Grant
Headteacher
Pewsey Vale School
Wilcot Road
Pewsey
Wiltshire
SN9 5EW

Dear Mrs Grant

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 29-30 September 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 good. Students are engaged and motivated by lively teaching which involves them directly in practical music making. In order to broaden students' experiences the school is seeking to find ways of involving outside agencies to broaden the range of extra-curricular activities offered to students.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are good.

- Attainment on entry to the school is below national expectations overall. Students make good progress in music and attain standards which are in line with national expectations by the end of Key Stage 3. Standards in Key Stage 4 are in line with national averages and, given that the attainment of these students was below expectations at the start of the course, these students also make good progress. The numbers taking GCSE courses are just above average.
- While there are good opportunities for students to learn a musical instrument, extra-curricular activities are currently focussing mainly on providing additional support for students taking GCSE music. During recent years, however, good numbers have been involved in activities such as whole school performances of musicals where standards are high. However, many students initiate their own extra-curricular music activities, including at the on-site Youth Centre which has specialist resources including recording facilities.
- Students have very positive attitudes to music and enjoy what they do. They work well together and respond very positively to the tasks given. Students in Year 11 have outstanding attitudes to their work.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good with outstanding features.

- Teaching is lively and engaging. It focuses very well on actively engaging students in practical music making where they learn through first hand experience.
- Lessons have a clear sense of purpose. Activities are well-sequenced and lessons have very good sense of progression. Students engage well with their learning activities and understand what they are intended to do.
- In some cases, however, students are not clear about the subject specific knowledge, skills and understanding they are expected to develop.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum is directly relevant to students' needs and interests. It is varied and includes a wide range of musical styles. Students enjoy these activities and provide regular feedback which is used to help to modify the curriculum. The subject leader has begun the process of reviewing the curriculum in Key Stage 3 to ensure that it meets the

requirements of the revised programme of study. This has been identified as an on-going process that will require further consideration to fully incorporate the new concepts.

- The curriculum is enhanced well through activities such as the annual whole-school musical, other extra-curricular activities and a range of student initiated activities. You recognise that students' experiences would be broadened if it were possible to enhance this provision by using additional expertise from outside agencies.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- You have a very clear vision for music and for the way in which it could be further developed to contribute to the school's recent designation as a specialist arts college. Overall provision is good although there are areas for development, which you recognise. Your monitoring and evaluation have rightly identified strengths in the quality of teaching and learning in music. You have made good use of these to support developments across the school as a whole.
- Effective strategies for assessment are being implemented and students' progress is carefully tracked.
- The subject leader is the only teacher of music and also has significant other responsibilities within the school. You have identified that existing links with other secondary schools could be further developed to enable collaboration and professional dialogue with other music teachers.

Subject issue:

Inclusion

- All students have good access to a wide range of opportunities within the curriculum. Work is well matched to the needs of students of differing prior attainment.
- Students also have good access to extra-curricular activities, although some difficulties are created by travel arrangements and the rural location of the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing and refining schemes of learning for Key Stage 3 to take full account of new National Curriculum orders and other national initiatives
- developing and broadening the range of extra-curricular activities
- building on the existing links with partner secondary schools to increase opportunities for professional dialogue with other music teachers.

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