

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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Ms A Canning
Headteacher
The Camden School for Girls
Sandall Road
London
NW5 2DB

Dear Ms Canning

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 05 - 06 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 outstanding. The outstanding quality of teaching and learning combined with the exceptionally wide range of curricular opportunities provide high quality music experiences which are accessible to all students. As a result they are actively and positively engaged in their learning and make exceptionally good progress.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Standards in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are well above national averages and students make exceptionally good progress. The numbers taking these courses are well above national averages.
- Standards in Key Stage 3 are above national expectations. The attainment in music of most students when they join the school varies from below to broadly in line with national expectations. Most make good progress during Key Stage 3 and many make exceptionally good progress.
- More than a third of students receive instrumental lessons and are involved in one or more of the wide range of extra-curricular activities beyond the classroom. Standards are high overall and they are outstanding in many ensembles.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their music making and they respond very maturely. They collaborate very well in group and whole class activities and support each other in a friendly and constructive way.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teachers' subject expertise is used very effectively to plan and teach lessons which are well matched to students' needs and interests. As a result, students are well motivated and they enjoy and engage well with their learning.
- Students are directly involved in practical music making and in listening carefully and critically to music. Consequently, they develop very good understanding of how their own music relates to that of other musicians.
- Teachers identify clearly what students are intended to learn and plan well-sequenced learning activities. Teachers then help students to reflect on, and evaluate, their learning. In a few lessons there could be a more precise focus on what students are intended to learn so that they are able to identify more clearly what they need to do to improve.
- Information and communication technology is used effectively to enhance students' experiences. Students in Year 9, for example, develop stylistic jazz compositions using a computer sequencing package. Older students use sequencing and score writing programmes very effectively across a wide range of musical styles and genres.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum is well-balanced and includes a wide range of musical styles. It meets students' needs and, at all stages, helps to prepare them effectively for further study. The department has identified the curriculum in Key Stage 3 as the key starting point for involvement in other music making within the school. In building on this feature the school has broadened the range of courses offered in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form to meet the differing musical skills and interests of students.
- The opportunities provided beyond the classroom include instrumental and vocal lessons and an exceptionally large number of extra-curricular activities. The range and quality of these are outstanding. Some allow able performers to take part in high quality music making, while others provide good opportunities for beginner and intermediate performers to take part in ensembles and clubs.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are outstanding overall.

- The school's vision for music is very clearly articulated. There is a strong sense of purpose, focusing on enabling all students to achieve well through being involved in a very secure curriculum and a wide range of additional opportunities. The department is not complacent and has identified ways in which it could develop further.
- The subject leader has correctly focused on developing a curriculum which meets the needs of all students in Key Stage 3 and on widening the range of styles and genres within and beyond the curriculum.
- The school has made very effective use of the funding resulting from specialist status to improve facilities and resources for music. These are now excellent. An increase in staffing levels and curriculum provision along with significant improvements in accommodation and resources, are helping the school to deliver a music curriculum that engages and motivates all students.
- Beyond the school, the specialism has enabled the school to build on its already strong partnerships with external bodies such as other schools, the local authority music service and professional bodies such as the London Symphony Orchestra. Links with professional musicians are having a significant impact on the opportunities provided for students and on the subsequent quality of their work. The school plays a key role in developing and supporting music in other schools across the local authority.

Subject issue: Inclusion

- The school provides a relevant and dynamic curriculum that engages all students. This has recently been further developed to involve an even wider range of students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The broad range of extra-curricular activities and instrumental and vocal tuition complement and extend this provision.
- The school has identified that singing is a way to involve all students in music making. Singing assemblies, involving, for example, the whole of the sixth form, make a significant contribution to enjoyment in music and also to developing community cohesion.
- The school maintains detailed records of involvement and achievement in music. It is therefore well placed to more formally evaluate its success in ensuring that all benefit fully from the music provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- building on and sharing the strong practice within the department to refine the learning focus in lessons and clarify how it is used by teachers and students to evaluate progress.

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

