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Mrs L Brooman
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Brooman

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 08-09 December 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 any 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, scrutiny of students' work, observation of lessons, and rehearsals of the school choir and chamber choir.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory, with good features. Most students join the school with below average standards and musical experience, although there are some who show good musicality. Teaching and learning is good in individual lessons, particularly helping students to make good progress in their instrumental performing work and composing. However, progress in listening work at Key Stage 4 is slower and prevents students from making better than satisfactory progress overall. Similarly, whilst leadership of the school choirs is excellent, the repertoire of these choirs does not engage all students, particularly boys, and together with

limited opportunities for singing in Key Stage 3, this means that overall progress across the school is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory overall, with good features.

- There was no GCSE group in 2008. Standards in the GCSE music examinations in 2005 and 2006 were below average. Results in 2007 were exceptionally low, but students made satisfactory progress considering their prior achievements in music. In all years, standards in the listening paper were considerably lower than in the performing and composing tasks. Current Year 11 students are making satisfactory progress, again with standards in listening tasks lower than those in practical work.
- Students in Key Stage 3 make good progress overall, particularly in instrumental performance work and composing. However, less progress is made in singing.
- Many more boys than girls take GCSE music. Conversely, though, a significantly greater proportion of girls participate in extra-curricular musical activities, particularly in the two school choirs. The small chamber choir, which is exclusively girls, performs to a very good standard. There is also a small windband. Students who receive additional instrumental tuition from Music Service teachers benefit greatly, both musically and personally.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good overall, particularly in relation to composing and performing.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and skills, and are confident musical role models for students. All lessons are well-planned. Students' behaviour is good and they are always willing to take part because they have confidence in their teachers.
- All lessons have music-making activities at the heart, mostly using instruments. These instrumental performing skills are taught particularly well, both in the classroom and in additional tuition.
- Singing is extremely well-led and directed in the choral rehearsals, with excellent modelling. However, not all students benefit from this expertise because of the limited curriculum opportunities for singing.
- Particularly good use is made of recordings, to save and appraise students' work. Information and communication technology (ICT) is also used well to help students record and layer their work and help those who find learning difficult participate in practical music-making activities.
- Work is assessed regularly. Students know how well they are doing, and what they need to do to improve.

- Listening activities in Key Stage 3 are planned to ensure that students experience a good range of musical styles. Good teaching helps students understand how the work of others relates to their own composition and performance work. Sometimes, though, there is too great an emphasis on students' spoken or written responses, rather than their musical responses. This is particularly the case in Key Stage 4.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The Key Stage 3 course meets all statutory requirements, although there are not enough opportunities for singing work. Planning for the GCSE course ensures that all Areas of Study are covered and all course requirements met. There is a strong reliance on students' literacy skills in reading and writing when completing listening work in Key Stage 4, as required for GCSE Music. However, this approach does not suit the needs, abilities or interests of all students and limits the overall progress they make at GCSE. Consequently, the school is considering alternative qualifications at Key Stage 4, and proper time and consideration is being given to this change.
- There is a good range of additional instrumental tuition available. However, there are no opportunities for additional vocal tuition. The windband and choirs provide good opportunities for those students who participate in these ensembles. However, the repertoire and styles of music covered by these extra-curricular groups do not appeal to all students and consequently not all groups of students are equally represented. This particularly the case with the choirs.
- There is a good range of resources that are managed well, including provision for information technology. Accommodation for music is cramped and restricts opportunities for group work. However, there are two small ante-rooms with the potential to be used as additional rehearsal or recording spaces. Students reported that the roof of the main music room is prone to leaking during inclement weather, and the effects of this are clearly seen on the ceiling. This is a health and safety hazard, as computers and electric keyboards are used in this room.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music is satisfactory overall.

- The music department is managed well on a day-to-day basis by the Head of Music and her colleague. You have shown good management of, and support for, the music department by facilitating their job-share and ensuring that students have continued to benefit from their good musical skills and knowledge.
- Whilst rightly recognising the strengths of the department you are also aware that there is more to be done, particularly in curriculum and extra-

curricular provision, to ensure that the musical experiences offered meet the needs, interests, and abilities of all students and that there are sufficient opportunities for singing in Key Stage 3.

- There are good links with the Music Service to support students' instrumental learning. Some additional support is also offered by peripatetic teachers in some components of the GCSE course. It is to the school's credit that all instrumental lessons are fully funded, requiring no contributions from parents. There are links with music in Primary schools through individual workshops and concerts, but there is no liaison about regular curriculum programmes.

Subject issue:

Inclusion

- All students are able to access additional music tuition and are welcomed to extra-curricular groups. Students of all abilities are represented in these activities. For some, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, music is an extremely important part of their school lives. However, some students – particularly boys – choose not to participate because, for example, the repertoire does not match their interests.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- as a priority, ensuring that the fabric of the music area meets all health and safety requirements
- ensuring that the provision enables students to develop their listening skills appropriately by starting with and building on students' musical responses, rather than being limited by their reading or writing abilities
- developing singing and ensuring that the range and repertoire of curriculum and extra-curricular activities reflects the needs, interests, and abilities of all groups of learners, particularly boys
- making more effective use of accommodation, creating more space for rehearsing and recording music.

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

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector