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Mr M Shew
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Dear Mr Shew

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 28-29 January 2009. 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 and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. There are strengths in the breadth of experiences provided by the school and in the good progress made by students in some lessons. In other lessons, however, students are not always sufficiently engaged in musical activities to enable them to make as much progress as they should.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory.

- Standards in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are similar to national averages. Students make satisfactory progress overall, with most meeting the targets set for them. The proportion of students involved in GCSE courses in recent years has been below the national average but numbers are now increasing. The recent introduction of a BTEC course alongside the GCSE course is encouraging more students with differing interests to study music in Key Stage 4.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly average. Many students make good progress from below average starting points, but this varies across classes. Where students make good progress their understanding is seen, for example, in the extent to which they evaluate and improve their music making.
- A broad range of students of different abilities and backgrounds are involved in additional experiences including instrumental and vocal lessons and extra-curricular activities, where good standards are attained.
- Most students have positive attitudes to music and are appreciative of the range of opportunities offered to them. They are actively involved, cooperating well with each other, although many are too passive when they are not engaged in music making.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- The best teaching, which is good, is characterised by a lively and focused approach which involves students in a range of well sequenced musical activities. In these cases students know what they are intended to achieve and engage positively in their learning.
- At other times, however, teaching does not focus sufficiently on engaging students in carefully planned musical activities. There is too great an emphasis on talk and sharing information rather than enabling students to learn through being involved as musicians.
- Lesson planning almost always identifies what students are intended to learn. In some instances, however, the objectives are either not precise enough or they describe the activities to be undertaken rather than the underlying learning. Students are therefore not always able to evaluate their own learning or decide 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 good overall.

- The curriculum provides a good variety of well chosen topics that meet the needs and interests of students. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is being

carefully revised in response to national initiatives. The curriculum in Key Stage 4 has been appropriately enhanced through the introduction of a BTEC course alongside the GCSE course. The school is part of a Sixth Form consortium which provides students good access to specialist courses in music and music technology.

- All students in Year 7 have the opportunity to learn an instrument for one term free of charge. Free instrumental lessons are also offered to all students studying music in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form and for those in receipt of free school meals.
- The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities which have been developed over recent years. These provide good performing opportunities for students. The school also organises a wide range of workshops and other activities which are provided by community musicians and others. This wide variety of activities helps to raise the profile of music in the school as a whole.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good overall.

- The school's vision for music is seen in its clear sense of purpose, which is evident in a number of ways. The commitment to broadening its provision to ensure that it meets the needs of all students is supported by well-targeted actions, often initiated by the subject leader and supported by senior leaders. For example, the initiative introduced last year to provide free instrumental lessons for all students in Year 7, resulted in almost all taking up the offer. Music makes a significant contribution to the school's specialist status, for example in developing partnerships with local primary schools and other community organisations. The recently completed good quality accommodation provides well for the range of teaching and learning activities both within and beyond the statutory curriculum.
- The school has accurately identified areas for improvement including achieving greater consistency in the quality of teaching and learning. It has used a range of strategies, including external support and internal mentoring, to make improvements. The school has good capacity for improvement.
- The school has developed many effective partnerships with external providers including the local authority music service and others. The subject leader is involved in local authority initiatives for music, including one which focuses on improving arrangements for transition when students enter the school in Year 7.

Subject issue:

Inclusion

- The school's belief that music should be accessible to all students is clearly supported by its actions. A wide range of students from all abilities and

backgrounds take part in activities including public performances and respond enthusiastically to the opportunities provided. Enhancements to the basic curriculum, such as the provision of specialist instrumental teaching for all students in Year 7, provide opportunities that are valued. Provision in Key Stage 4 and, through the consortium arrangements, in the sixth form, provide well for students' differing needs and interests.

- Information about pupils' interests and previous involvement in music making is identified when they enter the school in Year 7. The initial units of work in Year 7 are used to enable students to show what they are able to do in music. However, they are not used systematically to identify and record students' attainment against national curriculum levels. Targets for attainment at the end of the key stage are therefore not informed by this information. Records are kept of the progress made by students as they move through the school, but the details recorded vary across the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the impact of teaching by ensuring that that all lessons give sufficient emphasis to learning through and from music making activities
- adopting a more consistent approach to lesson planning so that expectations of what students are intended to learn in lessons are identified clearly and precisely
- using the expectations as the basis of assessment, by teachers and students, to inform planning, evaluate progress and identify areas for improvement.

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