

20 February 2009

Mr R Hawkins  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Hawkins

### Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on the 19-20 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 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, discussions with teachers from the local authority music service, scrutiny of relevant documentation and students' work, observation of lessons, and a rehearsal of the vocal group.

Whilst the overall effectiveness of music is now satisfactory, the leadership and management of the department are inadequate. There has been a period of recruitment and staffing difficulties, but the school has managed to provide an adequate curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4, together with a small range of extra-curricular and additional instrumental tuition opportunities. Recently the department has been enhanced through the appointment of a newly-qualified teacher who has brought fresh thinking and energy to the department. However, specialist support for this teacher from within the school has been insufficient. The music service has provided valuable help for curriculum work and for the small number of students receiving instrumental or vocal lessons. Nevertheless, there is more to be done by the school to ensure that all students at Smith's Wood, many of whom face considerable disadvantage, are able to make the

musical progress of which they are capable and to benefit from extra-curricular activities.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory overall.

- Standards and the quality of students' musical responses are below national expectations throughout Key Stage 3. However, students make satisfactory progress considering their levels of musical understanding and experience when they join Smith's Wood.
- Standards in the 2008 GCSE examinations were exceptionally low. Nevertheless, students made satisfactory progress in music when compared with their results in other subjects.
- Numbers of students receiving additional instrumental or vocal tuition, and numbers participating in extra-curricular music activities are small. However, some new opportunities have been provided since September 2008 including the school musical production, vocal group, and rock and pop clubs. These are helping to increase and widen participation.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- All lessons have clear learning objectives that are understood by students. Lessons always include practical music-making activities, which are enjoyed by students. Sometimes these tasks are too heavily directed by teachers and do not leave enough room for students' creative responses. Nevertheless, behaviour in lessons is satisfactory, and good working relationships help to create a positive learning environment.
- Classroom teachers have been introduced to the Dalcroze teaching methods by the music service, and these principles are used well in some lessons to help students develop their musical awareness. However, on occasions, there is not enough integration of listening with performing and composing activities, and students' learning is too heavily dependant on their understanding of staff notation. This inhibits students' musical understanding and limits their progress.
- Whilst information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively by teachers to record students' work, very little use is made of ICT by students because of insufficient resources.

## Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- Appropriate time is given for music in Key Stage 3, and the school has worked hard to maintain a GCSE course. Schemes of work are in place for both key stages. Overall, they ensure that there is sufficient subject coverage but do not show effective planning for students' long-term musical development. However, since September 2008 some new, improved units of work have been produced that show a more systematic approach to teaching and learning.

- Whilst uptake is low, there is a broad choice of additional tuition available, and it is to the school's credit that this is provided at no cost to parents. There is a widening range of vocal and instrumental ensemble activities including the vocal group, wind ensemble, and guitar group. Rock bands are able to rehearse independently and, for the first time, one group recently participated in a festival at the National Exhibition Centre.
- There is an adequate range of keyboards and percussion instruments for classroom use. However, there is extremely limited provision for ICT, which restricts students' engagement and progress in music. Whilst it is understandable that plans to enhance ICT in music have been put on hold until the major building work is completed and the music department moves from its current poor accommodation, this remains a key priority for development.

### Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are inadequate.

- There have been considerable recruitment and staffing difficulties over the past few years that have hindered the department's development, and consequently improvements have been limited.
- With the appointment of the newly-qualified teacher and the return of the subject coordinator from illness, the department is now much more stable. Whilst the newly-qualified teacher has been given excellent support with generic issues from senior leaders, the subject-specific support for her induction year has been poor.
- Valuable support has been given by the music service to support the department since the 2004 inspection, both through curriculum advisory and peripatetic teachers. The school has also invested in keyboards and other classroom instruments that enable two classes to enjoy practical music activities simultaneously. Nevertheless, the school recognises that successful completion of qualified teacher status is essential for the subject coordinator, as is appropriate subject-specific mentoring for the newly-qualified teacher.

Subject issue:

### Inclusion

- Whilst numbers participating in additional tuition and extra-curricular activities are small, all groups are represented, including students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- The proportion of students taking the GCSE music course is in line with the national average, which is good considering the school's context.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that there is good provision for information technology in the new accommodation, and that this provision is used effectively for teaching and learning in both key stages
- continuing the good work started on improving the schemes of work, ensuring that there is a clear focus on higher standards and students' musical development throughout the school

- in partnership with the local authority music service, developing more effective strategies for increasing access to and enjoyment of additional musical activities
- ensuring that the department builds capacity for further improvement through completion of qualified teacher status by the subject coordinator and by ensuring that the newly-qualified teacher's skills and knowledge are properly mentored and fully exploited.

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