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Mr F O'Neill
Principal
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Dear Mr O'Neill

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 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, students and the headteacher from a feeder primary school. Lessons and extra-curricular activities were observed and documentation was scrutinised.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. There has been some instability in staffing during the last two years and this has made it difficult for senior leaders to implement the improvements to music provision, which they recognise need to happen. Since Christmas, the acting subject learning coordinator has assumed responsibility for music in the absence, on maternity leave, of the substantive subject learning coordinator. In a short time, a clear overview of the department has been formed and extra-curricular activities and instrumental lessons continue to run

smoothly. For example, a more rigorous approach has recently been implemented to ensure that examination students attend an extra-curricular activity as part of their music learning.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are broadly average; however students' attainment in singing is below that expected. School data indicates that students' attainment on entry is slightly below average. Overall students make satisfactory progress.
- Small numbers of students study music at both GCSE and Advanced Level. Progress is satisfactory overall, despite some disappointing results in 2008, where students made less progress than expected, especially in the listening papers.
- An increasing number of students are involved in instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities. However it is mainly younger students who attend music clubs.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers are capable musicians who display good enthusiasm for music, successfully model music examples and engender positive relationships with students.
- Questioning is used regularly in lessons, but at times is shallow and does not enable students to provide detailed answers, develop musical discussion and engage in independent research. Older students especially are not given sufficient opportunity to use their previous musical knowledge in lessons.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used successfully in Key Stages 4 and in the sixth form, but is yet to be fully embedded into Key Stage 3, for example, by enabling students to make regular recordings of their work so that they can understand how to make improvements.
- Lessons do include some practical music making, but extensive verbal explanations restrict the time available for students' to respond creatively.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The overall quality of the curriculum and extra-curricular provision is satisfactory with a particular strength in the enrichment provided for students.

- The school is aware that the schemes of work need revision to ensure they meet the needs and abilities of all students. At present there is an over-reliance on worksheets, especially for students in Years 7 to 9. As a consequence there is a lack of creative music making and singing. Music activities are indicated but it is not always clear how students' musical skills, especially in singing, their knowledge and understanding are to be regularly developed in lessons.
- Good curriculum links with primary feeder schools ensures pupils are well prepared for secondary music lessons.
- The choice of extra-curricular groups has been increased recently and there is a comprehensive range of concerts, productions and music visits both within school and the wider community.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory.

- All leaders share a common aim to improve the quality of music provision. Priorities have been identified together with appropriate support and training where needed. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this support on students' achievement and attainment.
- The acting subject learning coordinator is actively seeking ways to increase the number of students taking music at both GCSE and Advanced Level as numbers currently are low.
- The acting subject learning coordinator is well aware of national issues for music and how these will impact on practice and students' attainment.
- The school recognises that although a comprehensive amount of data is collected about students' progress, this is not used effectively to identify and challenge the weaker aspects of music provision.

Inclusion

- The school collects information about students' musical interests and abilities but this is not always used effectively in lessons.
- The school is considering alternative music courses in their drive to provide more appropriate music qualifications for all students especially those who find the traditional GCSE courses challenging.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- completing the revision of all schemes of work to ensure that all aspects of music learning are covered equally
- improving the quality and frequency of singing

- making sure that the data collected about students' progress is used securely to identify underachievement and also to inform lesson planning
- ensuring senior leaders provide appropriate support for the acting subject learning coordinator as they implement priorities and challenge weaker aspects of music provision.

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

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector