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Mr P Daley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Daley

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on the 9 and 10 February 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, observations of lessons and scrutiny of documentation and recordings of students' work.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. The department has enjoyed staffing stability for the last year, following a period of instability. Through the strong leadership of the head of subject, combined with the energy and enthusiasm demonstrated by other staff, music has become a popular subject with students and this is shown by the significant increase in the numbers wanting to be involved in lessons and to study the subject in Years 10 and 11. However, the full impact of these developments on standards has yet to be seen across all the provision. Regular opportunities are provided for students

to perform both in lessons and assemblies and these contribute well to raising students' self confidence, esteem and awareness of different musical styles.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are broadly average. Students are competent users of music computer programs which they use to compose pieces, sequence and edit music, sometimes to match and enhance different visual stimuli. However students' attainment in singing and creating their own music using percussion instruments is slightly below that expected. Given students' average attainment on entry, overall, they make satisfactory progress.
- No students studied music at GCSE level in 2008. However students are now continuing their study of music in Key Stage 4. Standards for the current Year 10 and Year 11 students are broadly average with students having a secure understanding of different musical styles.
- An increasing number of students are involved in instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities. Students value highly the chance to be involved in arts events, productions and opportunities to perform to different audiences.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers display good enthusiasm for music and promote positive working relationships between themselves and the students. They use information and communication technology (ICT) successfully to engage students in learning, for example by using pieces of music with which students are familiar. However, occasionally students are given work to do without clear explanations and activities go on for too long.
- There is regular evaluation of the progress students make in lessons. At times too long is spent considering what mark to give the piece, rather than identifying music features so that students know how to make improvements. Opportunities are sometimes missed to allow students to demonstrate musically what they have learnt in lessons.
- In the best lessons, good opportunities are given for students to use previous learning in their composition work. For example, students described confidently their understanding of how to use the notes of a pentatonic scale as a basis for improvisation.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The school is aware that the revision of the schemes of work, for both Key Stages 3 and 4, needs to be completed. At present there is too much emphasis on students using computer programs and insufficient opportunity for students to use other instruments and sing. The curriculum for Year 7 students does, however, show a clear understanding of the work they have done in primary schools and how this is then developed and built upon at Clifton.
- Through specialist arts status there are good curriculum links with primary feeder schools to ensure that pupils are well prepared for secondary music lessons.
- Students welcome the increasing choice of extra-curricular groups and there are a number of concerts, productions, music and arts visits both within school and the wider community.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- There have been strong improvements in the range and quality of the music provision as a result of regular monitoring, effective support and the attention given to removing the barriers that have prevented all students making as much progress as they could.
- All leaders share a common aim to develop and improve the quality of music provision. A thorough analysis of current provision has been undertaken and a range of evidence sought which contributes well to the department's self-evaluation document. This identifies specific priorities for music and how they will be reached. Appropriate training and support is provided for those music staff new to teaching so that they can reflect upon and improve their practice, as well as senior leaders monitoring and evaluating well the work and priorities set by the subject leader.
- The subject leader is well aware of national issues for music and how these will impact on practice and students' attainment. Partnerships are strong and instrumental teachers are fully involved in their students' learning not only in instrumental lessons but also in class work.

Inclusion

- The school collects information about students' musical interests and abilities but recognises that at present this information is not used fully, for example to identify the progress of groups of students.

- The school knows that some students find the GCSE course in music challenging and is planning to offer a wider choice of music courses for students in Years 10 and 11 from September 2009.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring activities are increasingly more musically demanding
- creating opportunities for teachers to share and evaluate good practice in order to improve the overall quality of teaching
- completing the revision of all schemes of work.

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