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Mrs C Crowley  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Crowley

Ofsted subject survey: good practice visit in Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on the 24-25 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 your work with Musical Futures and the extent to which all students are benefiting from the provision for music.

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 National Coordinator for Musical Futures, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. Strong support for the music department from the senior leadership team, and also from interaction with Musical Futures as a Champion School, has enabled improvements to be made to the music provision. Music is led well and the school is aware of the need to continue to build on its good provision by refining the focus for assessment and finding ways for more students to benefit from music.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are good.

- Students' attainment is particularly good in Key Stage 4 where they achieve well above the national average. The numbers taking a GCSE in Key Stage 4 have increased and look set to increase significantly next year.
- Attainment in Key Stage 3 is more mixed. One of the Year 9 lessons based on Musical Futures showed an impressive degree of student engagement and sustained quality of work. Students demonstrated the ability to discriminate different features of a video recording applying the same depth of aural analysis they had developed in their own work. Another Year 9 lesson suffered from a lack of student preparation as not all groups had brought in their own choice of music which was to be used as the stimulus for the unit of work. Progress was thus much slower in this class. There was a similar mix of progress in other lessons.
- Good opportunities are provided for students to take part in a wide range of musical experiences outside of the classroom. However, the numbers involved in regular extra-curricular activities and in instrumental tuition are relatively low.
- The work based on Musical Futures has had a marked positive impact on behaviour. Students commented how much they enjoy this work and also how it has changed the way they listen to music outside of school as they now analyse it more closely.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- There are excellent relationships between staff and students throughout the department and teachers have high levels of musical expertise. Work is planned well and student behaviour is managed with considerable skill. Appropriate attention is given to involving students in deciding the content of some lessons; a good principle of the Musical Futures approach.
- The most effective teaching enabled students to learn through well sequenced tasks so that they could increasingly apply prior learning and consolidate musical skills, knowledge and understanding. Tasks also ensured students' listening skills were engaged and extended throughout the work.
- In less effective sessions, students skills were insufficiently developed, or questions were not always clear enough, for them to be able to respond as well as they could. The requirement to take registers at the beginning of every lesson also made it difficult for teachers to engage students immediately in music and this worked against the lesson being started in an exciting and stimulating way.
- The assessment process is very clear and there is excellent emerging use of audio recordings. However, the school recognises that the assessment criteria need to give more emphasis to the quality and depth of students' musical responses rather than focussing mainly on their level of skill.

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

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

- The curriculum is organised clearly with a very helpful overview for both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The curriculum and associated assessment processes have strong internal integrity. However, it is not always clear how students will make progress during each year and across each key stage.
- The curriculum and extended curriculum includes a good range of experiences although there is insufficient use of information and communication technology in Key Stage 3.
- The school has adapted Musical Futures to fit the needs of the students in the school. The positive impact of this approach on students' listening skills is clear and the school is aware of the need to explore the extent to which the Musical Futures approach, being used effectively in Year 9, could be also used in earlier years as part of the whole curriculum programme.
- Students are right in asking for more opportunities to enjoy regular music making in extra-curricular activities and through instrumental lessons. The school provides excellent financial support for instrumental lessons for all students and recognises the need now to consider extending the variety of opportunities through, for example, larger group tuition.

## Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- You, the senior leadership team and governing body have given good support to the music department and enabled the staffing to be increased. There are also good plans to consolidate and extend the staffing further through involvement of the team in providing instrumental tuition.
- The department has been led well through constant self-evaluation and deep thinking about how to improve provision further. The involvement of the school in Musical Futures is a good example of this development. This initiative has also provided good opportunity for the Head of Department to share ideas with others and, through selection as a Champion School, increasingly provide well-received support for other schools in the area.
- There is clear awareness of the power of music to help students both musically and personally and this power has been used with considerable success in the past to help re-engage a group of students in Year 8. However, opportunities to extend this success with other students are being missed.
- There have been good improvements in the provision for music and the school shows good capacity to enable further improvement.

Subject issue: Inclusion

- The school has some records of involvement but recognises that further collection and analysis of involvement in all activities is needed to ensure all students are involved.
- Good attention is being given to exploring different types of qualification in Key Stage 4 to enable more to enjoy continuing their study of music.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to find ways to enable more students to take part in regular extra-curricular opportunities
- revising and refining the assessment scheme to ensure more emphasis is given to increasing the quality and depth of students' musical responses
- building on the successful work with selected students in Year 8 to make more use of music's potential contribution to students' overall development by identifying those who would benefit most and enabling the music team to provide what is needed.

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

Anthony Knight  
Her Majesty's Inspector