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Mr R Flood
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Dear Mr Flood

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 11 – 12 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 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, students and a representative from the local authority music service, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. Satisfactory teaching now enables students to achieve satisfactorily in lessons, but overall they have made inadequate progress during their time at the school because of weaknesses in curriculum provision, teaching and leadership and management.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are inadequate.

- Students enter Year 7 with musical standards that are generally below average. By Year 9, they have declined significantly and are exceptionally low particularly in practical musical activities. Standards at GCSE are also exceptionally low. Theoretical work is particularly weak. In both key stages, progress is inadequate because of significant gaps in students' skills and their understanding of music. Nevertheless, standards are starting to improve, particularly in Year 7 as students gain a greater insight into a wider range of musical activities.
- Progress in singing and playing instruments is inadequate because there has been a legacy of underachievement and few opportunities for students to work together and develop their ensemble and performance skills.
- Although recently improved, students' understanding of music from other cultures and genres is poor, and they have very few opportunities to engage with different musical styles and traditions.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- The newly appointed teacher has quickly established good relationships with the students and teaching is underpinned by secure musical expertise and an enthusiasm to deliver high quality lessons.
- Lessons have an appropriate focus on creating music. The brand new scheme of work ensures that lessons are planned with a variety of engaging and enjoyable musical tasks that appropriately challenge the students. Most students cope reasonably well with the practical work but the gaps in their prior musical knowledge restrict the progress they make.
- Despite enthusiastic, skilled teaching, students generally take too long to grasp musical concepts and their lack of musical knowledge and skills is a barrier to the progress they make in lessons. Occasionally teaching provides too many instructions at the outset of a lesson, which slows the pace of learning and overloads the students with too much information.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- Whilst the newly introduced Key Stage 3 curriculum is appropriately focused on creative music making, student's lack of musical knowledge has not been fully taken into account when matching the tasks and topics to their generally very low-level abilities. Students enjoy the practical lessons and welcome the opportunity to play musical instruments rather than spend lessons copying from worksheets or watching music related DVD's. However, even within this much improved curriculum, there is not enough singing in lessons.

- Music is not studied in Year 10, because not enough students expressed interest in the subject. The handful of students studying GCSE in Year 11 have recently changed examination boards because they had not completed major aspects of coursework and needed to refocus their efforts in order to salvage any examination success. Up until very recently there has been no detailed scheme of work for the GCSE course. Consequently, many important aspects of the course have been overlooked.
- Because music has been undervalued in the past, the number of students participating in instrumental and vocal tuition and extra-curricular activities is extremely low for a school of this size. There are occasional concerts providing opportunities for soloists and small groups to perform. However, there are no larger extra-curricular ensembles that rehearse and perform on a regular basis and there has not been a whole school musical production for well over 10 years.
- Accommodation for music, including the small rooms for instrumental teaching and practice, is tired and uninspiring. Resources are inadequate. In particular, there has not been enough investment in music technology to engage and motivate students and increase the appeal of the subject. This, along with the general lack of appropriate facilities, is a potential barrier to raising standards and helping students achieve as well as they should. The new teacher is keen to involve the subject in the latest developments in music education and has already started making inroads to improving the curriculum.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are inadequate.

- Leaders have a realistic view of the effectiveness of the music provision, and are aware of what needs doing to improve the situation. However, there has been a lack of rigour in monitoring and challenging the department over time. Consequently, the curriculum has not kept up-to-date with either the needs or interests of students or statutory requirements. The quality of teaching and management has not been robustly challenged, and the department's own view of its provision and performance has been much too positive both in terms of the quality of learning taking place and the standards reached by students.
- The appointment, six weeks ago, of a new teacher in charge of music has already benefited the provision and students are keen to say how well things are improving, but it is too early to see any significant impact on standards and achievement. The subject leader role is not clearly defined and without the appropriate responsibility and, in turn, accountability the department will struggle to improve.
- The management of the input to the school from the local Music Service is weak. There is a lack of clarity and accountability resulting from a deficit of monitoring and evaluating by the school of the effectiveness of the provision and the value for money. For example, although the music service believes the school receives four and a half hours of instrumental teaching each week only seven students actually benefit from the input and visiting teachers appear not to be in school for that amount of time. The music department has not taken

advantage of other support and networking offered by the local authority, although plans are in place for the new music teacher to start attending regional meetings. There has been no involvement in any national initiatives.

Subject issue:

Inclusion

- Although most groups of students are represented amongst those receiving instrumental tuition or participating in extra-curricular activities the numbers involved are extremely small and do not fully reflect the balance of students in school. There is not enough emphasis placed on music as a personal, social and cultural experience.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards and improving students' achievement by implementing a curriculum that better matches the needs and interests of students and meets requirements in relation to the range of musical activities and provision of music technology
- improving the leadership and management of the subject at all levels to ensure that all aspects, including instrumental provision, are evaluated rigorously and managed to better effect
- ensuring that music receives the recognition it deserves within the school so that examination groups become viable, extra-curricular activities grow in popularity and interest in instrumental lessons expands to that seen in similar schools
- ensuring that the music curriculum engages students' interest through a structured range of creative experiences and all groups of students benefit from a wider range of extra-curricular opportunities.

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 Briggs
Additional Inspector