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Mr D Williams
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Dear Mr Williams

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 25-26 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 and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. Teaching engages students actively in practical musical activities which enable them to make good progress, especially in composing and performing. Students make the best progress when learning is focused on activities that are aurally based and the school recognises that this approach should be developed further.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are good.

- Standards in GCSE examinations are well above national averages. Students make good progress and achieve very well in relation to results in their other subjects. The strength of their work is in composing and performing and listening skills are relatively less well developed. Students make good progress from below average starting points and attain above average standards at the end of Key Stage 3.
- In both key stages students attain the highest standards and demonstrate their musical understanding and creativity most effectively when they are engaged in musical activities which focus on the development of aural skills.
- Good standards are attained overall in extra-curricular activities with high quality performances being achieved in choral and whole-school musical events.
- Students enjoy being actively involved in music making and many have outstandingly positive attitudes to their work. Students cooperate well with each other, develop self-confidence and are becoming increasingly independent learners. A student in Year 9 said that 'in music we learn to function as a group' and understood that this included both musical and broader attributes.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Relationships between teachers and students are very positive and students are encouraged and challenged to achieve well. In this positive climate students focus well on their learning and enjoy their music making.
- Teaching is purposeful and engages students directly in musical activities which allow them to develop their musical skills through first-hand experiences. Teaching is most effective when it encourages students to listen carefully and critically when composing or performing, as opposed to being over-reliant on the use of musical notation.
- Lessons are well focussed and almost always identify clearly what students are intended to learn. In a few cases learning objectives are either not precise enough or identify the activities to be undertaken rather than the underlying musical skills, knowledge and understanding that students are intended to acquire.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum for Key Stage 3, which is in the process of being re-drafted in response to national initiatives, includes a good variety of musical styles and genres and meets the needs and interests of students. The school recognises that, as the scheme is developed, it needs to give greater emphasis to the overall musical understanding that students are intended to acquire and fully reflect the requirements of the revised national curriculum.
- The recent introduction of a business technology and education council (BTEC) course alongside the GCSE course in Key Stage 4 provides further breadth and choice for students. Students following these courses are also very well supported by specialist instrumental teachers who work alongside class teachers in lessons.
- The school provides a good range of instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities, which provide additional opportunities for students to build on their learning. However not all groups of students are equally represented in these activities and the school is actively considering how this provision could be further developed.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good overall.

- The school has a very clear vision for music and a commitment to all students. The departmental has accurately identified its strengths and areas for development. The thoughtful and reflective subject leader provides a very clear sense of purpose and direction for the development of the subject.
- Significant improvements in the quality of accommodation and resources have been made, including the commitment to improving resources for information and communication technology (ICT). Other areas for development which have been identified include implementing strategies to enable more students, including those who find it difficult to fund the cost of tuition, to benefit from instrumental lessons.
- The school has effective partnerships with external providers including the local authority music service, further education providers and feeder schools. The school provides specialist support for music in its feeder schools which is helping to raise standards for the pupils involved.

Subject issue:

Inclusion

- The school is taking positive action to ensure that music is accessible to all students. Classroom activities motivate students, who are fully engaged in their learning. Recent improvements to the accommodation for music enable students to work more effectively and independently in groups where they are able to learn from and support each other.

- The subject leader has successfully implemented strategies to involve more boys in musical activities such as whole-school musicals. The school recognises that not all students have effective access to instrumental lessons and is seeking to address this.
- Information about students' interests and previous involvement in music making are identified when they enter the school. The initial units of work in Year 7 are used to enable students to show what they are able to do in music. However, this information is not used systematically, alongside other indicators, to inform targets for attainment at the end of the key stage.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the scheme of work for Key Stage 3 fully reflects the requirements of the new orders for music
- using information gained from the assessment of students' standards on entry to the school as the basis for planning subsequent work and informing targets for attainment at the end of the key stage
- involving more students, including those from different groups, in extra-curricular activities including instrumental lessons.

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

David Williams
Additional Inspector