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Rev. F Loftus  
Headteacher  
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Dear Reverend Loftus

### Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 10-11 March 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, scrutiny of relevant documentation and students' work, observation of lessons and instrumental tuition.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. While the teaching observed was satisfactory overall, significant weaknesses in the curriculum and leadership and management result in students not making sufficient musical progress, particularly in Key Stage 3.

#### Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are inadequate.

- Musical standards when students start school are broadly average. By the end of Key Stage 3, although a few students are able to perform well in small groups, overall standards are below average.

- Standards at GCSE in 2008 were above average and students obtained better results in music than many other subjects. Students gained most marks in their performing paper where they benefited from good instrumental teaching. Listening work was the weakest part of the examination. Current students in Year 11, a much smaller cohort than in 2008, are making satisfactory progress overall.
- In both key stages, there are significant gaps in students' skills and understanding of music as evident in students' music books and audio recordings. In Key Stage 3, students make inadequate progress overall, despite making satisfactory progress in the lessons observed.
- Some students benefit well from individual instrumental and vocal tuition. However there are too few opportunities for them to work together and develop their ensemble skills.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is inadequate although students made satisfactory progress in relation to the content taught in the lessons observed.

- Teachers planned individual lessons carefully with some regard to previous learning. Most lessons had an appropriate focus on practical music-making which were enjoyed, especially by older students. This helped them to make satisfactory progress in the lessons seen. However, their learning overall is limited by gaps in previous learning and is too dependent on their understanding of staff notation.
- Teachers modelled work well and through their knowledge of music they were able to set appropriate tasks for different ability groups. However, the objectives identified for students at the beginning of lessons, did not always indicate what they will learn by the end of the lesson. Although some good practice was observed where older students set themselves goals for the lesson, this was not replicated in lessons for Key Stage 3 students.
- Whilst information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively by teachers to record students' work, very little use is made of ICT by students because of insufficient resources.
- Good teaching was seen in individual instrumental lessons. Students made good progress because teachers' modelling was effective. As a result, students' instrumental techniques were developed well together with their listening and performance skills.

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

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

- There is no detailed scheme of work for either Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4. A brief overview of the units to be taught is used by teachers to plan lessons. Consequently, there is no long-term planning for the development of key musical skills and understanding.
- There are no computers in the music rooms and the statutory requirements for use of information and communication technology (ICT) in Key Stage 3 are not being met. Older students are sometimes taught in the computer suite, but there are no other music instruments for them to use in this room, as they develop and refine their compositions.

- While singing is included in some lessons there is insufficient systematic development of this aspect of music making.
- A range of instrumental and vocal tuition is offered. However there are no extra-curricular ensembles for students who have lessons so they can rehearse and perform on a regular basis. Some students do, however, form their own small groups out of school and about twenty students take part in the popular Foot Tapper's Band which meets regularly at the local primary school. There are also very popular annual whole school productions which are enjoyed by those students who take part.

## Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are inadequate.

- The school's leadership, throughout the inspection, gave an open and frank evaluation about what needs to be done to improve provision further. However, there has been insufficient monitoring and challenge to the department over time. Consequently, it was not possible to provide an analysis of previous results or demonstrate and discuss how staff plan lessons to develop students' musical skills, knowledge and understanding. Although students' work is assessed, the outcomes are not shared sufficiently with students so that they are able to understand how to improve and set themselves goals to achieve.
- The school is urgently reviewing its line management arrangements and is considering how best to provide the necessary support and challenge.
- The subject leader ensures that the department, including the work of the visiting instrumental staff, runs smoothly from day-to-day. Opportunities are sought to involve students in external workshops with professional musicians, for example, understanding the use of improvisation within jazz.

## Inclusion

- Analysis of those students involved in additional instrumental lessons and activities revealed that not all groups of students are involved.
- A similar number of boys and girls study music at GCSE level, however the number involved this year, compared to 2008 when it was above, are below the national average.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing a curriculum that fully reflects all aspects of music learning, including singing development and ICT, and matches the particular needs and interests of students
- ensuring that lesson planning is more detailed and that students have a clear understanding of what they are to learn in lessons, rather than do, in order for them to make more progress
- providing more ensembles and regular opportunities for students to perform in groups to a variety of audiences
- providing support, training and monitoring to ensure that these curriculum, provision and leadership developments are realised and that they lead to improved student participation and achievement.

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