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Mr M G Ruhrmund  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Ruhrmund

### Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 12-13 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, and observation of lessons.

In the period since the school became a specialist performing arts college in 2005, there has been considerable turnover in staffing for music. Since September 2008 a new teaching team has brought a new energy to the department. Much has been achieved and the overall effectiveness of music is now satisfactory. Nevertheless, there is still some way to go before provision and standards in music reflect the school's specialist status.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory.

- Overall, students' musical understanding at the start of Year 7 is broadly average and remains so throughout Key Stage 3. Whilst they show interest and much willingness to participate in creating music, their musical understanding is limited because their progress in developing vocal and instrumental skills is only satisfactory.
- Standards at GCSE were below average in 2008 and these students did not achieve as well as they should. However, the learning seen and work scrutinised during the inspection confirm that current GCSE students are making satisfactory progress.
- Students' achievement in the A Level music course is broadly satisfactory, although the progress made by music technology students is limited because of accommodation difficulties.
- The proportion of students opting to take a GCSE or A Level course in music is now just above average. However, whilst numbers receiving additional instrumental or vocal tuition, or participating in extra-curricular activities are increasing they remain low, particularly in the context of the school's specialist status.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good features.

- Teachers set very high expectations for behaviour and participation in lessons, and they are rewarded with outstanding attitudes and behaviour from students. Working relationships are outstanding. The newly established staff team has made the creation of this positive ethos a priority for improving the department, and Year 9 students say that they have found music lessons considerably more enjoyable this year.
- However, expectations for students' musical development are not as high. Lessons are well-planned, have clear objectives, and are always focussed on practical music-making. Nevertheless, students' success is often judged only on their completion of the task, rather than the increasing quality of their work. Teachers are very positive and their comments motivate students to participate and enjoy; however, more challenge is required if musical standards are to improve and students are to make better progress.
- Whilst there are now suitable resources for information and communication technology (ICT), they are not being used effectively in Key Stage 3. Regular recordings are made of students' work and assessments made, although these are not always accurately linked to National Curriculum levels as they separate students' progress in listening, composing and performing activities rather than considering the overall development of their musical understanding.

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

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

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum meets all statutory requirements, except for ICT. Opportunities for the use of ICT have been identified but these have yet to be integrated into schemes of work. The schemes of work are being thoroughly reviewed and renewed. They are currently uneven in quality because, whilst there are outline plans for all key stages, not all of the units of work are planned in detail and there is insufficient focus on the musical progress that is expected of students, particularly from Years 7 to 9. Ensuring that detailed schemes of work are in place from September 2009 is an important action for improvement.
- There are increasing opportunities for students to sing and play instruments together in the school choir, the Elastic Band, and the successful musical productions. There is also a range of additional instrumental and vocal tuition, together with the local authority area music centre which meets on the school premises every week.

## Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- The new staff team has worked hard to improve provision since September 2008. The school is realistic about the current quality of musical outcomes for students and has a clear vision for future improvement. There is a detailed subject improvement plan in place that has a strong focus on raising standards and improving the curriculum. Although accommodation for music remains cramped, particularly for music technology, it has been renovated and re-equipped and now offers a brighter, more welcoming learning environment.
- The new head of department is highly organised and the department is well-managed. Mentoring for the newly-qualified-teacher is very good. Both teachers have up-to-date knowledge and understanding of current issues in music education, including the Key Stage 3 music strategy.
- Good links have been established with feeder primary schools, including an African drumming project that has been led by the head of department.

Subject issue:

## Inclusion

- The school actively encourages students with learning difficulties to take additional instrumental tuition by offering a significant reduction in payment for those with special educational needs. Consequently, a good number of these students benefit from this provision. However, whilst subsidies are available, there are no students in receipt of free school meals who receive additional music tuition or participate in extra-curricular activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards achieved by students in all key stages by increasing teachers' expectation of the quality of students' musical responses in lessons
- ensuring that all schemes and units of work are planned in sufficient detail, and plan for students' musical development across years and key stages
- ensuring that all statutory requirements for ICT are met in Key Stage 3
- increasing participation rates in additional instrument tuition and in extra-curricular activities.

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

Mark Phillips  
Her Majesty's Inspector