

20 March 2009

Mr P Blinston
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Dear Mr Blinston

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on the 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, students and significant partners, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons, extra-curricular activities, assemblies, a chorister rehearsal and Evensong.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. Students enjoy a wide range of musical experiences and welcome the opportunity to lead musical ensembles. Strong partnerships have been developed with other schools and the music service. The choristers receive high quality musical training. Large numbers in the school benefit from instrumental tuition and the numbers of students involved in regular extra-curricular activities are increasing. The school recognises the need to provide more extra-curricular opportunities for younger students.

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 GCSE in Key Stage 4 fell in the

current Year 10 but look set to increase significantly next year to above the national average. Attainment in the sixth form is also good especially at A level.

- Students achieve well in Key Stage 3, although this occurs at times more as a result of their own application of their ability than as a direct result of the expectations set by the teacher. For example, in one lesson, students extended the task set by the teacher and created some high quality rhythmic pieces for tuned and untuned percussion making confident use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Standards are high in extra-curricular activities. The performance by the jazz group was impressive, especially as the music had been arranged by one of the sixth form students.
- The attainment and progress made in the junior department was more mixed. The standard of performance by the choristers is exceptional and excellent progress was made in their rehearsal. Less progress was made in the class music lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- There are some excellent relationships between staff and students. The boys' singing group was a delight as the quality of interaction between students and teacher was of the highest order. Students spoke very positively about the support and encouragement given by staff, including their instrumental teachers.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers engaged students' listening skills from the beginning of the lesson. There was an appropriate balance of teacher input and student exploration. Questions probed students' understanding and high expectations meant that students were constantly challenged to provide an even better response. However, some opportunities were missed to fully explore the most stimulating questions as a result of the perceived need to focus on examination requirements.
- In lessons that were less effective, students were not always prepared sufficiently for the task set and so progress was limited. There was insufficient recognition of the ability of students and the set tasks did not provide sufficient challenge or development. In the junior department, opportunities were also missed in the class lessons to make the most of the skills and interests of the students and too much talk prevented students from being able to demonstrate their musical talent. In contrast, the economy of language and constant emphasis on the highest quality of musical response in the chorister rehearsal resulted in a high level of sustained improvement.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum is organised well across the main school. There is a good range of different musical styles and the expectations for each unit of work are clearly defined. However, there is insufficient planning for class music in the junior department. The school also recognises the need to reconsider how music theory is taught so that it is directly linked to practical work and matched more closely to students' different learning needs.

- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities and while numbers are increasing the school is aware of the need to ensure early access for all students. The short lunch time also makes it very difficult for teachers to help students make as much progress as they could in these ensembles.
- The curriculum in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is limited particularly given the music specialist status. Although music technology has recently been introduced and some students have taken a BTEC qualification it is surprising that there are no opportunities for the talented students to take qualifications early.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- There have been good improvements to the music provision since the move to the new accommodation. For example, numbers involved in extra-curricular activities have increased. Good links have been developed with partners including the music service and the developing links with primary schools are very well received. The folk group led by a governor is contributing much to the music provision.
- The link to the Church, particularly through the excellent musical development of the choristers, is very strong. However, the whole school could benefit from more regular opportunities to enjoy and appreciate the high quality of music making achieved by these students.
- Music, as a specialist subject, is seen to be an important part of the school. There is clear recognition that this role can be extended even further, for example, through making more of the way music can help students with different learning and personal needs.
- There is an accurate view of the provision and a clear understanding of the need to continue to give a priority to the ongoing improvement of provision so that all students and students benefit fully. In particular, you recognise the need to increase consistency in the quality of teaching and to ensure that the class music provision in the junior department reflects both the musical and personal needs of these children.

Subject issue: Inclusion

- There are good opportunities for students to learn a musical instrument but relatively few of the younger students in the main school are included in regular extra-curricular ensembles.
- The school is right to give renewed attention to ensuring the curriculum meets all learning needs. This includes the exploration of different qualification routes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- finding ways to increase the numbers of younger students involved in extra-curricular activities
- continuing to increase consistency in the quality of teaching particularly in ensuring sufficient musical challenge in Key Stage 3
- looking again at the class music provision in the junior department to make sure it matches students' learning needs.

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