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Mr T James  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr James

### Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 16-17 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, discussions with a parent-governor, scrutiny of relevant documentation and students' work, and observation of lessons and ensemble rehearsals.

With above-average standards, an increasing range of extra-curricular activities and growth in numbers taking GCSE and A Level courses, the overall effectiveness of music is good. However, there remain some important aspects of the department's work that require development, in order to raise standards further and deepen students' musical understanding.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are good overall.

- Standards throughout Key Stage 3 are above average. Standards attained at GCSE are also above average, and these results represent good progress given students' starting points. Whilst students' composing and listening work shows secure musical knowledge, their musical understanding is developed best through performance work.
- Standards in A Level music and music technology are broadly average, and students make satisfactory progress on these courses.
- The proportion of students opting to take a GCSE or A Level course in music has increased considerably and is now above average. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities which are well-attended and enjoyed by students of all abilities, who show a good willingness to engage with a range of musical styles. The annual house music competition, which is organised and led entirely by sixth formers, involves a significant number of students and makes an important contribution to school life.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Students have excellent attitudes to learning and are always willing to participate. These qualities are important in helping students to make good progress.
- Teachers have high expectations. They have good musical skills, which they use to model confidently. Working relationships with students are good. Lessons are planned thoroughly, with clear learning objectives. Most lessons have an appropriate focus on students' active music-making. Students enjoy participating in these practical activities, which help them to acquire a good understanding of stave notation. Extra-curricular ensemble activities are particularly well-led.
- Where teaching is less effective, more emphasis is given to explaining musical theories or concepts through extended verbal presentations. Whilst this approach helps students to acquire academic knowledge and prepare for examinations, it does not always sufficiently improve their musical understanding.
- Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) for creating music. Regular recordings and assessments are made which are appropriately related to the National Curriculum Levels.

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

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

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum meets statutory requirements, including those for cultural understanding and ICT. The scheme of work gives an overview

of the topics and activities to be covered, but is inconsistent in its depth of planning and does not take account of the revised National Curriculum orders. In particular, there is insufficient consideration of the integration of listening, performing and composing and the progression of students' musical understanding through Years 7, 8 and 9. Similarly, whilst there are overview plans that complement the published examination specifications in Key Stages 4 and 5, there are no medium-term plans in place to support teaching and learning across the department.

- A good range of additional tuition is available and these, together with the junior choir, girls' choir, wind and jazz bands, African drumming, guitar group and the annual musical production, help students to extend their musical experience. Whilst similar proportions benefit from additional tuition, twice as many girls than boys take part in group activities. Increasing boys' involvement, particularly in vocal work, is an important area for further improvement.

### Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good overall.

- There is a good ambition for music. The head of department, supported by a good team, has worked with determination to facilitate improvements in participation, provision, and standards. The department is well-supported by senior management, including generous timetabling in Key Stage 3 that allows students to be taught in smaller classes with greater challenge and support for different ability groups.
- Whilst self-evaluation correctly identifies the department's strengths, there is much less consideration of the subject-specific issues that affect musical learning, particularly in the classroom curriculum.
- The instrumental and vocal tuition programme is well managed, and these teachers contribute well to ensemble activities. However, links with feeder primary schools are much less well developed.

### Subject issue: Inclusion

- Most groups are represented in examination courses, instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities. More experienced students and those with good musical potential are identified and challenged appropriately. The African drumming group provides a focussed activity for some students who find learning difficult.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that detailed and effective schemes of work are in place for all three key stages, to support students' musical progression and teachers' planning
- ensuring that all teaching focuses on the quality of students' musical responses and understanding as well as their acquisition of knowledge about music

- increasing boys' participation in extra-curricular activities, particularly in vocal work
- developing effective curriculum links with primary schools.

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