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Mr R Tarleton  
Principal  
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Dear Mr Tarleton

### Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 02-03 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 the links you have developed with other colleges 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 college 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 and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is outstanding. The high quality of teaching and learning and the wide range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities motivate and engage students positively in their learning, enabling them to make exceptionally good progress.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Standards overall are high and students make exceptionally good progress. In 2008 the proportion of students taking the GCSE examination was more than twice the national average. All attained high grades and over half gained A\* or A grades. Students' results in music were well above those in their other subjects. Standards attained by the small number of students studying music in the sixth form have varied from year to year, but almost all meet or exceed their targets. Students in a performance studies lesson improvised sensitively and imaginatively, adapting their music to match the changing moods of a dance choreographed by other students.
- The attainment in music of most students when they join the college is broadly in line with national expectations. Students make good progress during Key Stage 3 and many make exceptionally good progress. By the end of Key Stage 3 many students attain above national expectations and standards overall are high.
- More than a quarter of students receive instrumental or vocal lessons and a similar proportion of students are involved in extra-curricular activities. Standards are high overall and are outstanding in many activities including the annual performances of musicals and operas.
- Students have very mature and positive attitudes to their music making. They collaborate very well in group and whole class activities, supporting each other in a friendly and constructive way. Many students, including those on the college's music council, play a key role in the development of music, for example in organising public performances and leading extra-curricular activities.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teachers have a clear understanding of what students are intended to learn. Lessons have a clear sense of purpose and activities are well sequenced and matched to students' needs and interests.
- Teachers engage students in practical music activities which place the emphasis on developing their aural skills. Teaching is often lively and characterised by an infectious enthusiasm. As a result, students are very well motivated and enjoy their learning.
- Teachers support students well, helping them, to evaluate their learning and identify how it might be improved. For example, when students are composing, discussion focuses on the musical quality of the work and how the music may be developed or changed to establish a particular mood or effect.

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

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

- The well-balanced curriculum includes a wide range of musical styles which are relevant to, and enjoyed by, students. The department uses feedback on the curriculum from the college's music council as part of the process to ensure that it fully meets students' needs and interests. The scheme of work for Key Stage 3 is being carefully updated to reflect national requirements. Units of work outline progression by identifying relevant national curriculum levels.
- Opportunities provided beyond the classroom include a wide range of instrumental and vocal lessons and extra-curricular activities. Regular opportunities for students to perform, including in operas such as Turandot, and musicals such as The Sound of Music and Star Child, are a strength of the department's work. Performances in the local and wider community, foreign visits and exchanges with students from other schools, including a partner school in Bangkok, further enhance the quality of provision and experiences for students.

## Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are outstanding overall.

- The college's vision for music is very clearly articulated. There is a strong sense of purpose which focuses on enabling all students to achieve well through being involved in a wide range of activities within and beyond the curriculum.
- The large and strong team of music teachers is very well led by the subject leader. The department is reflective and constantly seeking to improve the quality of education it provides.
- The college has instigated many additional opportunities for students both within college, the local community and more widely. Strong links with the college's sports specialism lead to effective collaboration. The well established links and exchange visits with a school in Bangkok provide good opportunities for developing students' cultural as well as musical understanding.
- The college's outreach work, provided through its advanced skills teacher and other strategies, provides helpful support for students and staff in other schools and colleges.

## Subject issue: Inclusion

- The college provides a relevant curriculum that engages all students. The broad range of extra-curricular activities and instrumental and vocal tuition complement and extend this provision. As part of the process to ensure that all groups of students are involved the subject

leader has successfully implemented strategies to involve more boys in musical activities.

- Information about students' interests and previous involvement in music making are identified when they enter the college. 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. The school recognises that the further refinement of its monitoring of the involvement of different groups of students will enable it to more formally evaluate its success in ensuring that all benefit fully from its music provision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using information gained from the assessment of students' standards on entry to the school to inform targets for attainment at the end of the key stage
- continuing to develop the monitoring of the involvement of different groups of students in extra-curricular activities, instrumental and vocal lessons.

I very much hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in your college.

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 college. 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