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Mr S Hillier
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Dear Mr Hillier

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 04-05 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 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 observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is outstanding. The outstanding quality of teaching and learning motivates students very effectively and helps them to achieve well.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- When students join the school their attainment overall in music is below national expectations, although a small proportion attain in line with expectations. During Key Stage 3 students make good progress and many make exceptionally good progress. As a result they reach above average standards by the end of Year 9. Students show their understanding of music especially well in their composing where they draw on what they have learned through listening to the music of other composers.
- Students make exceptionally good progress in Key Stage 4 and attain high standards. The number of students studying music in the sixth form in recent years has been relatively small and standards range from average to above average.
- Students achieve well in instrumental and vocal lessons and in extra-curricular activities, including in the recently formed boys' Barbershop group. Particularly high standards are attained by the Senior Girls Choir, which has a well established programme of high profile performances including successful participation in national events.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their music making. They work well together and support each other in a friendly and constructive way. Members of the choir are taking a key role in leading and mentoring pupils in primary schools as part of the national Sing Up initiative.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- In almost all lessons teachers identify very clearly and precisely what they intend students to learn and plan very well sequenced activities which enable students to learn effectively. Lessons are often characterised by lively discussion and the use of well focused questioning to check students' understanding of what they are intended to learn and do.
- Lessons involve students directly in active making music with an emphasis on careful and critical listening. As a result students quickly develop their understanding of the key musical aspects of different musical styles and genres. Students then use their understanding effectively when composing their own music.
- In a few lessons, planning does not identify clearly and precisely enough what students are expected to learn, as opposed to do. As a result, activities are less well matched to the needs of all individual students.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum is well-balanced and includes a wide range of musical styles. It meets students' needs and interests and contributes well to the good progress that they make. The scheme in Key Stage 3 very clearly identifies progression throughout the key stage by identifying how the work relates to national curriculum expectations. Students use this information to assess their own work and to identify the next steps in their learning.
- The school is making good use of recent national initiatives in developing the curriculum in Key Stage 3. It is also reviewing the range of certificated courses offered in the sixth form.
- The opportunities provided beyond the classroom include instrumental and vocal lessons, extra-curricular activities, workshops, regular performance opportunities and annual foreign tours. These meet the needs and interests of the students involved, although the school recognises that the range of activities available could be widened to involve a broader range of students.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are outstanding overall.

- The school has a clear vision and sense of purpose for music. The department's self-evaluation has accurately identified strengths and areas for development. For example, as part of the process of broadening the range of extra-curricular activities, and to increase the proportion of boys involved in singing, a Barbershop group has been formed.
- The school has recognised, within the department, its expertise in evaluating and developing the quality of teaching and learning. This is being used effectively in contributing to a whole school focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Despite limitations in its accommodation, good use is made of resources and available spaces. The recent appointment of a specialist technician is having a positive impact on the efficient use of computers and other electronic resources.
- The school has well established partnerships with other schools, including those involving the department's advanced skills teacher. Partnerships with other providers, including the local authority music service and community-based musicians provide a range of enhancements for students within and beyond the school community.

Subject issue: Inclusion

- The school provides a relevant curriculum that engages all students. It has recognised the need to build on its existing extra-curricular programme and has begun to implement a wider range of opportunities to involve other students.
- The school identifies students' interests and involvement in music when they enter the school and records their progress as they proceed through the school. The school recognises that the further development of how it monitors and analyses the involvement and achievement 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:

- building on the strong practice within the department to refine the precision and clarity of learning objectives in all lessons
- continuing to develop the range and breadth of extra-curricular activities in order to involve a wider range of students.

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

David Williams
Additional Inspector