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Mr J White
Headteacher
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Dear Mr White

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on the 18-19 May 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: observation of lessons and extra-curricular ensembles, scrutiny of relevant documentation and students' work. Discussions were also held with members of staff, students and peripatetic instrumental staff.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. Students are engaged and motivated by lively teaching which includes good opportunities to involve them directly in practical music making. The students who are involved in the many additional ensembles and choirs run by the music staff, thoroughly enjoy and benefit significantly from the chance to perform before different audiences in school, with the local community and during the regular music visits to Europe.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are good.

- Musical standards when students start school are broadly average. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average. Students, overall, make good progress.
- Standards in GCSE examinations overall, are above the national average. For the last three years, an above average number of girls have studied music. However a below average number of boys have chosen to take music and generally they attain grades which are lower than that of girls, and to those attained by boys nationally. Currently there are more boys than previously, studying music in Year 11, and the majority of them are on track to reach or exceed their target grades and thus close the attainment gap that currently exists between boys and girls.
- Standards in music and music technology in the sixth form are similar to national averages. Students make satisfactory progress overall. They reach higher grades at Advanced Supplementary level than at Advanced Level. The school has investigated reasons for this disparity and adapted the content of lessons to address this issue. Overall, students generally attain better results in their music examinations than in their other subjects.
- Good standards are attained overall in extra-curricular activities with high quality performances being achieved in choral, instrumental and whole-school musical events. Students have exceptionally positive attitudes to music and enjoy what they do. The music department is a lively, friendly place where senior and younger students mix and work well together, readily sharing their musical interests and skills.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Relationships between teachers and students are very constructive. In this positive climate students focus well on their learning and enjoy their music making as a result of lively and engaging teaching.
- Lessons are taught at a good pace and teachers regularly question students' understanding of their work. However, sometimes, insufficient time is given for students to reflect, consider and develop their answers.
- Activities are well-sequenced and lessons have a very good sense of progression. Students engage well with their learning activities and understand what they have to do. Helpful and detailed comments in the students' log books enable them to develop and improve their compositions and musical skills, before moving on to another topic.
- The school recognises however, that the regular audio recordings of students' work, which is a common feature of Key Stage 4 and sixth form lessons, is not used as frequently with students in Years 7 to 9.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is varied, provides a good range of well chosen topics and is being carefully revised in response to national initiatives, students' needs and interests. It provides an appropriate introduction to the types of music which students will study if they choose the subject in Key Stage 4. Students provide regular feedback to their teachers which they use when modifying the curriculum.
- Music and music technology are both offered in the sixth form, with the latter being very popular especially for students considering the music industry as a career choice.
- The school provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities which have been developed over recent years. These give additional opportunities for students to build on their classroom learning. However not all groups of students are equally represented in these activities and the school is actively considering how this provision could be further developed. Nevertheless, the benefits for those who are involved are evident, through the high quality performances and the pride students feel when taking part in music competitions.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- The department has accurately identified its strengths and areas for development. The thoughtful and reflective head of department leads by example and provides a very clear sense of purpose and direction for the development of the subject.
- Teachers work exceptionally hard as a team and give freely of their time to ensure students get the best possible musical experiences, despite the rather cramped accommodation and lack of rehearsal space which becomes acute when visiting teachers are present. Students report how much they value teachers' support and the opportunities they have to use music facilities out of lesson time.
- Monitoring of provision is undertaken regularly through observations and regular meetings. This, together with appropriate professional development, ensures good practice is shared between staff.
- The school has developed effective partnerships, for example, with other primary schools, the community and Artforms, the music service for Education Leeds. Instrumental staff are regularly involved in the work of the department, for example in the annual workshops involving younger students and pupils from the local primary schools. The head of department is also involved in many local authority initiatives for music, including one held recently to promote and develop singing.

Inclusion

- All students have good access to a wide range of opportunities within the curriculum. Work is well matched to the needs of students of differing prior attainment.
- Analysis of students involved in additional instrumental lessons and activities revealed that not all groups of students are involved. Many more girls than boys take part in ensembles, especially within the choirs, and choose to study music at GCSE level.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- making audio recordings more frequently so that students can listen to, and refine, their work during lessons
- ensuring there is sufficient time in lessons for students to reflect, consider and develop their answers
- involving more students, including those from different groups, 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

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector