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Mrs M Whitfield
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Whitfield

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 13 and 14 October 2009, to look at work in music.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the extent to which all students are benefiting from the provision. I also explored the partnerships you may have developed with other schools and agencies to improve continuity and increase opportunity for your students.

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. 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 interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, and observation of five lessons and a year-group music assembly.

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be satisfactory. In recent years attainment has been below average. The college's recent federation and the appointment of new senior and middle leaders have resulted in decisive action being taken to improve provision. This has resulted in improved attainment and satisfactory achievement.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Standards in GCSE examinations over the last four years have been below average. Students have not always attained in line with their results in other subjects. Standards are rising and students in Year 11 are now making satisfactory progress and attaining broadly in line with GCSE expectations.
- Attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 has risen over the last three years and is now broadly in line with national expectations. This represents at least satisfactory progress, given students' starting points in Year 7.
- The proportion of students involved in vocal or instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities is good in Key Stage 3, but satisfactory when considered across the whole school.
- Students have positive attitudes and enjoy their music-making, especially when working with others in small groups. However, many still lack confidence in working independently.

Quality of teaching of music

The quality of teaching of music is satisfactory.

- Working relationships between teachers and students are good and ensure a positive climate for learning. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and their expertise is often used well to demonstrate good quality music-making.
- Teaching is most effective when it focuses directly on active music-making and where activities are strongly related to real-life musical practice. However, it is less effective when there is too much teacher talk, or when activities do not involve students directly in music-making.
- Lesson planning identifies broad aims but does not identify sufficiently clearly or precisely what students are intended to learn by the end of the lesson. Students are, therefore, not always able to assess their own progress or identify what they need to do to improve, although teachers do provide good, helpful feedback to support their learning.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is adequately matched to the needs and aptitudes of students and is being further developed and adapted to meet changing requirements. It includes a satisfactory range of styles and genres but some units of work focus on developing skills, or on the use of notation, without explicitly placing the learning in a musical context.

- The scheme of work provides an outline of what is to be taught and of progression in learning over time. It does not, however, identify expectations for attainment at the end of each unit.
- Opportunities provided beyond the classroom include instrumental and vocal lessons, and a reasonable range of extra-curricular activities. The college has correctly identified the need to extend the range of these activities to provide additional opportunities for students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- The school's vision for music is clear as seen, for example, in the focus on providing equal access to music for all students within and beyond lessons. Good systems have been put in place to identify students' musical interests and involvement and appropriate initiatives have been planned to provide new activities.
- Self-evaluation in music has correctly identified areas of strength and those in need of further development.
- Effective use is made of the expertise of instrumental teachers to support learning in Key Stage 4. This is helping to raise achievement in music. The school has also identified how the recent federation with its partner college might be used to help and support the further development of music.

Subject issue – Inclusion

- The school is clear in its belief that music should be accessible to all students. All students in Key Stage 3 have equal access to music within the curriculum and there is good access to music in Key Stage 4. The school's focus on extending the range of extra-curricular activities has resulted from an audit of needs and interests and has been planned to provide musical opportunities for more students, including those from different ethnic groups and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Subject issue – Partnerships

- The school has well-established partnerships with its feeder schools and is beginning to develop effective ways of working with its partner secondary school in the recently established Federation. Students from different year-groups have particularly benefited from projects involving community musicians.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- building on existing effective practice to improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that all lessons have a strong focus on aural development and active music-making
 - identifying clearly and precisely what students are intended to learn in lessons

- strengthening the impact and cohesion of the curriculum by:
 - consistently placing students' learning within a musical context
 - identifying what students of differing prior attainment are expected to learn by the end of each unit
 - developing further the range of extra-curricular activities

- developing the effectiveness and impact of partnerships, including those within the Federation.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in the 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

David Williams
Additional Inspector