

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



25 November 2009

Mr A J Stanley  
Headteacher  
St John's Catholic Comprehensive School  
Rochester Road  
Gravesend  
Kent  
DA12 2JW

Dear Mr Stanley

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 20 and 21 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 included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, observation of six lessons and an assembly that included music-making.

The overall effectiveness of music was is good. While few students opt for specialist instrumental or vocal tuition, teachers' commitment to developing secure skills for all students, through practical music-making, is fundamental in helping them to achieve well.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- When students join the school, attainment is below national expectations. Although they make only satisfactory progress in other aspects, students

achieve especially well when performing on instruments. As a result, they make good progress in developing their musical understanding and by the end of Year 9 attainment is broadly average.

- The well-above-average proportion of students in Years 10 and 11 who study music make good progress and their attainment is above average. Almost all develop the required knowledge, skills and understanding in lessons, without additional specialist instrumental or vocal tuition.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their music-making. They collaborate well with each other in group and whole-class activities, although not all are confident independent learners.
- The relatively high proportion of students who took A-level examinations in music over the last three years attained broadly average results and made satisfactory progress. Results for the few students who studied music technology at AS level in 2009 were below average. This was the first time this course had been offered. As a result of the re-evaluation of the courses offered in the sixth form, students are now following a level 3 BTEC course. They are well motivated and, in lessons seen, were making good progress.

#### Quality of teaching of music

The quality of teaching of music is good.

- Positive professional relationships between teachers and students provide a secure basis for effective learning. Teachers use their subject expertise very well for musical demonstrations, in asking pertinent and challenging questions, and through feedback to help students improve their work.
- Teaching places an appropriate focus on involving students directly in active music-making, especially in performing. However, insufficient emphasis is sometimes placed on the overall development of musical understanding through integrating the different aspects of the subject.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used regularly to support students' achievements and is especially effective in supporting composing for GCSE and A-level courses.

#### Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The class-based curriculum provides a good basis for students to develop musical skills, especially in playing instruments. The department is re-writing schemes of work in response to recent national and school developments, recognising the importance of integrating different aspects of the music curriculum.
- Curriculum planning identifies progression through increasing the level of demand in the selected repertoire. The school recognises that it needs to ensure that progression is also defined in terms of the overall musical understanding that students are intended to acquire.

- The enhancement of the curriculum through extra-curricular activities, including instrumental and vocal tuition, is satisfactory. As a result of their practical experiences in the classroom, several students have taken part in percussion ensembles and performed at very high standards, including at national events. The school recognises the need to widen access to specialist tuition, including for students who, in the future, will have taken part in whole-class instrumental lessons in their primary schools.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is good.

- The school's vision for music is focused clearly on ensuring equal access for all students through a practical curriculum. The well-above-average numbers who participate and make good progress in the GCSE course demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach.
- The distinctive strengths and expertise across the subject team are managed well and used effectively to enable students to make good progress. The department recognises, however, that aspects of curriculum planning require further consideration and development.

#### Subject issue: Inclusion

The school's open-access policy, resulting in large numbers of students choosing music at GCSE, is a good measure of the school's inclusive approach to music. Although very few students receive additional specialist instrumental or vocal tuition, reasonable numbers are involved in extra-curricular activities, where they often use instrumental skills developed in class lessons. The school recognises that there is scope to extend this provision and that it needs to analyse the involvement of different groups more systematically to plan to meet their needs.

#### Subject issue: Partnerships

The school has supported the development of music in feeder schools and is very aware of how its own subject expertise can support pupils in these schools. A group of pupils from one nearby primary school are benefiting from the guitar club run by some senior students. The school has also established worthwhile links with some community groups. It recognises the importance of the further involvement of external agencies and professional musicians to provide specialist tuition and to enhance further students' musical experiences.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- building on the success of instrumental work in the curriculum by:
  - making explicit how the different aspects of the curriculum will be integrated

- using the overall understanding identified in the National Curriculum to support planning and to help to monitor progress
- widening access to additional specialist instrumental tuition and extra-curricular activities for all students, informed by the analysis of the involvement of different groups of students
- extending partnerships with other schools, agencies and musicians.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in the school.

As explained in the previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

David Williams  
Additional Inspector