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15 December 2009

Mrs R Paul  
Acting Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Paul

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 2 to 3 December 2009 to look at work in music.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of music, the visit had a particular focus on the extent to which all students are benefiting from the provision. I also explored the partnerships you 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: discussions with staff and students; observation of five lessons; music showcase performance and ensemble rehearsals; analysis of recorded performances and compositions; and scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. Previous staffing instability has been resolved. There are strengths in the good number of additional ensembles provided by the school which are supported well and enjoyed by students.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- An above-average proportion of students take GCSE music. Standards attained by students in 2009 were above those found nationally and

represented good progress. These results were a considerable improvement compared with those in 2008. Lesson observations and school data indicate that current Year 11 students are also making good progress.

- Students' prior attainment and musical experience is varied but generally below average when they join the school. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are below average, representing satisfactory progress. Students make better progress when playing instruments compared with other aspects of the music curriculum, such as singing.
- Standards in the A-level music course are broadly average, representing satisfactory progress for these students. The 2009 music technology results were below average; however, most students reached or exceeded their targets.
- Students involved in extra-curricular groups benefit greatly and are rightly appreciative of the commitment and opportunities provided by the music staff. Standards reached by groups, such as the soul band, are good.

#### Quality of provision

The quality of teaching of music is satisfactory.

- Students enjoy the relaxed atmosphere created by the music department and the friendly relationships they have with their teachers. However, more able students are correct in feeling they could be challenged more in lessons.
- Students make most progress where there is a clear focus for learning and all know what they need to do to improve their work. This was clearly seen in the lesson where students made effective use of the criteria for assessment and video recordings to check what they needed to do to reach a higher level.
- Lessons in Key Stage 3 have a strong emphasis on directing performance and ensemble skills. However, less emphasis is given to developing students' understanding of musical concepts and other skills, such as singing.

#### Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Music, dance and drama lessons are planned in conjunction to develop performing arts themes through these subjects. Students welcome the curriculum changes for Key Stage 3 which were introduced in September 2009. They describe work now as 'much more organised'. As a result of arrangements to link performing arts subjects together, students in Years 7 and 8 are taught music in blocks of time during the year. While planning indicates there is sufficient coverage of the curriculum, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this arrangement and whether it will lead to better than satisfactory progress in all aspects of music learning.

- Music teaching and practice rooms are cramped and situated in different parts of the school. A new purpose-built music suite is due to open next year. Although the school is well resourced for electronic instruments, currently the number of computers is not sufficient for the number of GCSE students.
- There is a good range of additional instrumental and vocal tuition provided by local authority staff and private teachers. The many ensembles provide good opportunities for students to participate and enjoy music making.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

Leadership and management of music are satisfactory.

- The music staff work well as a team and together with senior leaders, have raised the profile of music in the school significantly. Previous disappointing results have resulted in a number of improvement strategies, for example, stricter coursework deadlines and support for underachieving students. These resulted in improved GCSE results in 2009. The school has correctly identified increasing the proportion of students reaching the highest grades as a priority.
- More ensembles have been established, involving a cross-section of students with differing musical interests and abilities. This positive approach is welcomed by students.

Subject issue: inclusion

- An above-average proportion of students takes GCSE music. Those with less developed instrumental skills are fully integrated within the groups.
- The school provides a number of different ensembles and enables students to form their own instrumental groups.

Subject issue: partnerships

- The department provides support, including planning and classroom teaching, to feeder primary schools.
- Strong links have been established with instrumental staff from the local authority music service who provides good support to the department, especially when preparing students for the performance part of their examinations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' achievement at Key Stage 3 by:
  - ensuring that learning in lessons has a clear focus on developing individuals' musical skills as well as their performing arts skills
  - developing the musical quality of students' classroom singing

- ensuring that the proportion of students attaining the highest grades in examination courses is increased
- monitoring the impact of the Years 7 and 8 curriculum changes on students' achievement.

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

Marianne Young  
Her Majesty's Inspector