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Mr C Gilbert
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Dear Mr Gilbert

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 1 and 2 December 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and learners, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, and the observation of five lessons and an extra-curricular activity.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. Good teaching involves students directly in practical music making and enables them to develop good musical understanding. The curriculum is matched well to students' needs and interests and music lessons are enjoyable. Well above average numbers take music at GCSE where they make good progress in relation to their starting points.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- When they join the school in Year 7, most students are attaining below the national expectations for music. During Key Stage 3 they make good

progress and by the end of Year 9 most attain broadly in line with the national expectations for music.

- The proportion of students who study music at GCSE is well above average. Many begin the course without having previously received additional instrumental or vocal tuition. During Key Stage 4 they make good progress in relation to their prior attainment and results in GCSE examinations are similar to those found nationally.
- The proportion of students receiving instrumental or vocal lessons has increased recently and, especially in Key Stage 3, is now good. Many are also involved in extra-curricular activities where they achieve well.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their music making. Initially, some are not effective independent learners, and are over-reliant on their teachers. However, they quickly gain confidence and collaborate very well in small group and whole-class activities. They support each other in a friendly and constructive way.

Quality of teaching of music

The quality of teaching of music is good.

- Teaching is lively and engaging. It focuses strongly on developing students' musical understanding through involving them in well-sequenced practical music activities where they learn through first-hand experience.
- Students are challenged to achieve well in lessons. Teachers make ongoing assessments of students' work and support them well through good feedback which helps them to improve. Sometimes, however, insufficient emphasis is placed on improving the quality of music making as opposed to increasing the level of difficulty or technical challenge involved.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to support students' achievements, including through the use of electronic keyboards and recording equipment. The school is upgrading resources for ICT to improve students' use of specialist music software.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- The curriculum, which is enjoyed by students, includes a good balance of musical styles and genres. Curriculum planning shows a clear sense of progression from one year group to the next. For example, there is an increasing level of challenge in how different musical devices are introduced throughout Key Stage 3. The department systematically reviews its provision and, when appropriate, takes into account the views of students. The department has rightly identified the need to increase further its provision for singing in Key Stage 3 and extend its use of ICT following recent improvements to resources.
- The curriculum is enhanced through a good range of instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities. Students value these opportunities and say

that they enjoy taking part in them. The school recognises the potential to develop further the range and breadth of extra-curricular activities.

- While the music classrooms are spacious and generally well-resourced, there are insufficient smaller rooms for students to work effectively in groups. Although teachers manage the current situation well, it limits the extent to which students can listen carefully and critically to their own composing and performing to evaluate and improve the quality of their work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is good.

- The school's clear vision for music is rooted in reflective practice which has enabled an inclusive approach towards providing musical opportunities for all students. This is seen, for example, in the high numbers studying music at GCSE, including many who do not receive additional specialist tuition.
- The department has identified key priorities for development and is taking action to implement improvements, for example to curriculum planning and through involvement in whole-school working parties to improve teaching and learning.

Subject issue: inclusion

- The school's aim to make music accessible to all students is being met in many ways. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is reviewed and modified to reflect the needs and interests of students. Music in Key Stage 4 is available to all who wish to study it, regardless of their previous involvement. Instrumental tuition and extra-curricular activities involve students from almost all groups within the school, including, for example, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Subject issue: partnerships

- The school makes very effective use of its links with the local authority music service, which provides instrumental teaching to students and support for teachers. Students' learning has been enhanced by the involvement of professional musicians, as seen for example in the recent workshops on Blues music. The school recognises the potential of involving professional musicians more widely to enhance experiences for students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement further by:
 - ensuring that singing is taught more regularly throughout Key Stage 3
 - providing appropriate opportunities for supporting learning through broadening the use of ICT

- extending opportunities for students by developing further:
 - the range of extra-curricular opportunities
 - the involvement of professional and community musicians.

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

As I explained in the 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