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Mr T Samain
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Samain

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 and 3 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: discussions with staff; meetings with students; observation of seven class lessons and a Soul Band rehearsal; consideration of recorded performances and compositions; and scrutiny of relevant documentation.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. Music is a popular subject in the curriculum. Higher-than-average numbers opt for examination courses with significant numbers of students from other schools joining The Hewett for sixth-form music courses. The A-level music technology course is a particular strength of the school. However, standards in Years 7 to 11 remain below average and, overall, students make satisfactory progress.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Students' prior attainment and musical experience is below average when they join the school. Standards remain below average throughout Key Stage 3, representing satisfactory progress.
- Numbers of students taking GCSE music are above average, including those who attend as part of the consortium Diploma arrangements. Although the 2009 examination results were exceptionally low, standards at GCSE are usually below average. For the past three years, all groups have made satisfactory progress, considering their starting points.
- Students start the sixth-form courses with average prior attainment. This is because significant numbers join from other schools. Standards in A-level music are also average, with students making satisfactory progress. In A-level music technology, standards are high and achievement is good.
- The overall number of students benefiting from additional instrumental or vocal tuition is satisfactory. Relatively low numbers of students in Years 7 to 11 participate in extra-curricular activities. However, participation of sixth-form students is good, and good standards are reached by groups, such as the Soul Band.

Quality of teaching of music

The quality of teaching of music is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good musical skills and knowledge. Lessons are planned thoroughly with clear learning objectives and planned learning outcomes. These always include opportunities for students to improve and develop their musical understanding through practical tasks. Often, though, these opportunities start too late in the lesson. Teachers' long verbal introductions and explanations at the start of the lesson mean that students sit passively for too long before they engage meaningfully with active music-making or listening. This sometimes restricts students' progress and enjoyment, particularly those who find learning or concentrating in class difficult.
- Regular recordings are made of students' work. However, these are not used enough to help students appraise their work or help them improve their performance. In the sixth form, while students are aware of the tasks that they need to complete, specific grade criteria are not shared effectively to help them understand what is needed to achieve the highest grades.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Appropriate time is given to class music lessons in Key Stage 3. While the planned programme meets students' interests well, it does not give equally appropriate coverage to all musical styles and experiences. There is limited development of singing, and popular music genres are promoted much more strongly than other styles. A new Year 9 course, based on the

Musical Futures initiative, has been introduced recently. Students welcome the way this approach emphasises independent learning and their own musical interests. However, there is more work to be done to ensure that, alongside this approach, students also continue developing instrumental skills with expert guidance from their teachers.

- The department is well-resourced, particularly for music technology. Accommodation has expanded to include a large suite of practice rooms, three classrooms and an information and communication technology suite. However, no technical support is provided and this makes it difficult to keep the accommodation and resources well-organised and well-maintained on a day-to-day basis, particularly with such large numbers of sixth-form students working independently on music technology projects.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- The head of music, supported by his enthusiastic team, has raised the profile of music in the school significantly. Nevertheless, to promote better progress in Key Stages 3 and 4, schemes of work require more thorough planning with greater emphasis on raising the musical standards of students' work and ensuring that all appropriate styles and musical experiences are covered adequately.
- Monitoring by senior management shows a good understanding of the department's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers have received up-to-date training on the Key Stage 3 curriculum, the Musical Futures initiative, and through Ofsted subject reports.

Subject issue: inclusion

- Most groups of students are represented in additional tuition, extra-curricular activities, and examination courses. An equal proportion of students with special educational needs and/or difficulties participate across the department, as do those with English as an additional language.

Subject issue: partnerships

- The school has built good partnerships with other local schools and the City College to offer GCSE and A-level music courses to students who would otherwise be unable to access them. These students benefit from the school's provision but also give a deal back to school, particularly in the sixth form.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving curriculum planning and students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that all appropriate musical styles and experiences are covered well, particularly at Key Stage 3

- ensuring that all planning sets clear expectations for the standards that students should achieve as well as the activities they are to complete
- ensuring that students are musically active from the start, and throughout, every lesson
- providing additional support for the management of the department's resources, and for teachers and students in music technology lessons.

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 and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector