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Dear Mr Johnstone

Ofsted survey inspection programme – music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 and 20 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; visits to rehearsals and instrumental lessons; and observation of four classroom lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate.

There is a varied and well-established extra-curricular programme which is valued and enjoyed by participating students. The significant commitment given to these activities is appreciated greatly by school and community leaders. However, the public profile of these groups masks inadequacies in classroom provision, which have not been monitored or supported effectively enough by senior leadership. Concerns raised in previous inspections have not been tackled. Consequently, students in both key stages make inadequate progress in developing their musical understanding.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Students join the school with broadly average abilities. Their progress in music during Key Stage 3 is inadequate because standards are low by the end of Year 9, particularly in singing, creating, and listening to music.
- The proportion of students taking GCSE music varies from year to year, but, overall, is broadly average. Results are in line with national expectations. However, these students make inadequate progress because many are of higher ability and benefit from additional specialist instrumental tuition. They achieve significantly less well in music than they do in their other subjects. This poor progress was confirmed in learning observed during the inspection.
- Satisfactory proportions of students participate in additional instrumental lessons and extra-curricular opportunities. These activities do much to boost participating students' self-esteem and to raise the school's profile in the community.

Quality of teaching of music

The quality of teaching of music is inadequate.

- Working relationships are positive. Students are managed firmly but fairly; they do what is asked of them willingly.
- Resources are well organised and lessons usually include a practical element. However, considerably more time is spent on verbal presentations, or writing about the history and theory of music, than on practical work. There is not enough planning of learning objectives and little integration of performing, composing and listening activities to develop students' musical understanding.
- Work is assessed and graded but, in Key Stage 3, recordings are not made of students' work and they do not produce notated scores of their compositions. While GCSE students use new technology to create music, there is no use of information and communication technology in Key Stage 3 except to research music topics or give verbal and visual presentations.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- A rotation system in Key Stage 3 means that students are taught music for only 10 weeks each year. The scheme of work does not cover the required content in sufficient breadth or depth, and does not promote key concepts and processes effectively. There is very little provision for the development of classroom singing.

- Less than two hours each week is given to the GCSE course, and the scheme of work does not detail how students' skills and musical understanding should be developed across the areas of study.
- Extra-curricular activities include the corps of drums, band, orchestra, and choir. There are annual musical productions and opportunities for rock bands to rehearse and perform. These opportunities are valuable, but they do not compensate sufficiently for inadequacies in the classroom curriculum.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is inadequate.

- There is strong leadership of ensemble activities, and instrumental lessons are organised well. However, leadership of classroom music is unsatisfactory because schemes of work are inappropriate and teaching does not promote the development of students' musical understanding.
- There has been some monitoring of examination results and of teaching, but senior leaders' evaluation of the music department has been based heavily on the impact of extra-curricular activities. Key issues from previous inspections have not been tackled and, indeed, there is now less time for curriculum music than in 2004.
- A graduate teacher trainee is placed in the department. The school's provision in music is not giving him the experience he needs. It is an urgent priority to ensure that alternative arrangements are made for his training.

Subject issue – Inclusion

- There is good inclusion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities. However, provision in class lessons for these students, and for those who are more able, is limited because all are given the same tasks and expected to work at the same pace.

Subject issue – Partnerships

- There are good partnerships with the local authority music service to provide instrumental lessons. The head of department has provided short programmes of whole-class brass teaching and extra-curricular opportunities for feeder primary schools, and is an examiner for GCSE. However, the benefit of these partnerships is limited because students' prior musical experiences are not recognised adequately when they join Year 7, and the GCSE scheme of work is poorly planned.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that there is adequate curriculum provision by:
 - allocating sufficient time at Key Stages 3 and 4 for the necessary depth and breadth of content, concepts, and key processes
 - providing comprehensive schemes of work that reflect all curriculum requirements and which promote high standards of musical learning

- improving the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that lessons are planned thoroughly, with priority given to the development of students' musical understanding through the integration of listening and practical music-making activities
 - ensuring that new technologies are used appropriately to create, record and assess students' work

- improving the management of music by:
 - providing more robust monitoring through a much stronger focus on curriculum provision and outcomes
 - ensuring that alternative and appropriate arrangements are made for the graduate teacher trainee.

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

This visit has raised concerns about aspects of the school's work. I will report these to the Regional Director who will consider what action to take and may arrange an inspection of the whole 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

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector