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Mr A Hamilton
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Dear Mr Hamilton

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 25 and 26 January 2010 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 observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. Teaching engages students well and involves them actively in an enjoyable range of musical styles and genres, both within and beyond lessons. The curriculum meets the needs of most students but is not always adapted sufficiently for more and less able students.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly average. Students make satisfactory progress in lessons and in relation to their starting points. They listen carefully to music and identify many features and characteristics of what they hear. Many compose and perform music

effectively, although not all have developed sufficient skills to be able to achieve all the aims of the tasks set.

- The proportion of students taking music in Key Stage 4 in recent years has been small. Although there has been some variation from year to year, results in most years have been above national averages. The school's analysis identifies that almost all of the small number of students studying music in Year 11 are on track to achieve well in the GCSE examination.
- A good number of students are involved in vocal or instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities, which they enjoy and appreciate, and where they achieve well. Students have positive attitudes to music, cooperate with each other very effectively and enjoy their lessons.
- The number of students taking music at A level is small. Students make satisfactory progress and results are broadly in line with national averages. Students in the sixth form help with concerts and other musical events and a few help to coach younger students in musical activities.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Good working relationships between teachers and students help to ensure a positive climate for learning. Teachers' strong subject knowledge is often used effectively, for example to ask probing questions, to select music for listening and to provide helpful feedback. Students' musical understanding is developed well through listening to contrasting pieces where they identify the key features of music from different styles or periods.
- Lesson planning in Key Stage 3 identifies clearly what students are intended to learn. Activities chosen often enable students to make good progress. However, in a small minority of cases, they are not well matched to the needs of less or more able students.
- Teaching is most effective when the focus of the lesson is on critical listening and active involvement in music-making. It is less effective when there is too much teacher talk or when explanations are over complex. Feedback to students helps them to improve their work but the information gathered is not always used effectively to modify the lesson in order to maximise students' understanding.
- Satisfactory use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to support students' composing in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The school recognises that the use of ICT in Key Stage 3 needs further development and has plans in place to tackle this. Little use is made of recordings of students' work to celebrate achievement, provide a stimulus for new work or to develop students' self-assessment and listening skills.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The scheme of work for Key Stage 3 includes a satisfactory range of musical styles and genres. The scheme includes planned opportunities for

singing but does not explicitly identify how singing, including singing in parts, is to be developed progressively throughout Key Stage 3.

- The scheme includes detailed planning for lessons and identifies what most students are expected to achieve by the end of each module. However, it does not define clearly what students of differing prior attainment are expected to achieve by the end of each module or identify how work might be differentiated or extended for more and less able students.
- Opportunities provided beyond the classroom include a good range of instrumental and vocal lessons. Further opportunities are provided for students through a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities, although many more girls than boys are involved in these.
- Accommodation for music is good and is used well. Resources for music, especially computers and recording studio facilities, are being improved and the school has identified ways in which the use of ICT will be developed further in Key Stage 3.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- You provide good support for music, especially within the context of the small subject team. In raising the profile of music and in increasing students' involvement, the subject leader has focused recently on increasing the range of activities beyond the classroom. This is having a positive impact on students' involvement.
- The school has good systems to monitor the quality of its provision and uses the findings of its self-evaluation to identify where further developments or support are needed. Feedback from students is collected and used well as part of the process of identifying areas for development.
- The school has rightly identified, as a key priority, the further development of the curriculum in Key Stage 3, in order to raise achievement and to encourage more students to be involved in music at GCSE and A level.

Subject issue: inclusion

Students from most groups in the school are involved in extra-curricular activities and instrumental or vocal lessons and overall numbers are high. The proportion of girls involved is significantly higher than boys, although as many boys as girls are involved in GCSE or A-level courses. Relatively few students who are entitled to free school meals are involved in extra-curricular activities.

Subject issue: partnerships

The school has well-established partnerships with the local authority music service and with other agencies and musicians. These include projects that involve music in cross-curricular initiatives with other arts subjects and mathematics, which help to develop greater coherence in the school's curriculum as a whole. The school also has good and developing links with its

main feeder school, where it provides good opportunities for collaborative work, including supporting the development of composing.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the curriculum by:
 - completing the re-drafting of the scheme of work, identifying what students of different prior attainment are expected to learn by the end of each unit
 - ensuring that opportunities for using ICT and developing singing are identified more clearly in Key Stage 3
 - building on the existing range of extra-curricular activities

- improving the quality of teaching by:
 - matching activities more carefully to the different needs and abilities of students
 - using information, gathered through assessment and recordings of students' work, to modify teaching and inform planning.

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