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Mr A Long
Principal
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Dear Mr Long

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 24 and 25 February 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: observations of five one-hour lessons; interviews with staff; discussions with selected students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; and analysis of students' work.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. There has been unavoidable disruption to the department because of the subject leader's sixth-month absence, from which she has recently returned. The appointment of a temporary subject leader has ensured that music has remained on the curriculum and some additional opportunities are provided. However, there are serious weaknesses in provision and outcomes. These go back over a number of years. Students' achievement is inadequate as a result of an inadequate curriculum and teaching strategies that do not promote the development of students' musical understanding.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Standards of work in Key Stage 3 are very low across all areas of musical experience. Students make unsatisfactory progress during years 7 to 9, given that they are of broadly average ability when they join the college. Standards at GCSE are also exceptionally low. In 2009, students attained over two grades lower than the national average. They also achieved very poorly in comparison with their performance in other subjects. This pattern of serious underachievement has been the case for at least three years.
- Participation rates in additional music tuition and in the small range of extra-curricular activities are extraordinarily low. Only around one student in every fifty benefits from specialist instrumental or vocal coaching.
- Because of the poor provision, opportunities are missed to boost students' personal development and, indeed, the well-being and morale of the whole college, through music.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Lessons are organised efficiently and teachers set appropriate expectations for students' behaviour. However, expectations for the musical standards that students can achieve are too low. Lesson content and repertoire are often too simple or not age-appropriate. Too often, overgenerous praise fails to correct mistakes or challenge students to produce better quality work.
- Students say that they enjoy practical activities, but they are also correct to say that too much lesson time is spent by the teacher talking to the class. It is during these prolonged periods of inactivity that students' behaviour sometimes deteriorates. Similarly, too often, work is driven by written tasks that hinder students' aural development and restrict their musical responses. For students with literacy difficulties, this immediately presents a significant barrier to musical learning and enjoyment. Very little use is made of recordings to capture and assess the musical quality of students' work.
- Very limited use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve students' learning. No meaningful use is made of ICT in Key Stage 3.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum comprises the established scheme of work together with alternative projects recently introduced by the temporary subject leader. Printed resources are professionally produced, but these focus largely on written and theory work. There is no sense of progression

through the key stage; there is no planning for the development of students' musical skills and understanding as they move from Years 7 to 9. The curriculum does not provide sufficient breadth. There is very little coverage of world music styles.

- Two hours a week is timetabled for GCSE music in Year 11. There were not enough students for a viable timetabled course in the current year 10, so these students are being taught through a weekly after-school session. No music courses are currently running for sixth-form students.
- The range of additional tuition and ensemble activities is unsatisfactory. Students do not have any opportunities to experience professional performances through visiting artists or concert visits.
- Accommodation for music is cramped. Practice rooms are untidy and a large amount of floor space is taken up by desks in the main music room. Resources are just adequate, but students are correct to expect a greater range of instruments to work with.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- While recognising the disruption to the department through the subject leader's absence, the GCSE results over time and the curriculum offer show that concerns about music provision go back much further than the recent past. The subject review, undertaken shortly after your appointment last year, confirmed this. Consequently the outcomes, judgements, and issues for improvement from this inspection were no surprise to you. However, these issues and the subject leader's absence, shows the vulnerability of a single-teacher department. Over time, there has been insufficient support both from within and outside the school to assure the quality of provision and to provide subject-specific networking and training.

Subject issue: inclusion

- Although very few students are involved in music, it is encouraging to note that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are represented, including in GCSE music groups.

Subject issue: partnerships

- Three peripatetic teachers from the local authority music service visit the school. The subject leader has made some links with primary schools and helped them by teaching some classes. However, there are no significant links with other music groups or organisations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising the standards achieved by students in every aspect of their musical development by:

- improving attainment at GCSE so that students achieve as well as other students nationally
 - significantly increasing the numbers benefiting from additional instrumental and vocal tuition and participating in extra-curricular ensembles
- improving the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that all lessons use music as the ‘target language’, with much less reliance on the spoken and written word by teachers and students
 - significantly increasing expectations of the musical quality of work in lessons through the standard and content of the work that is set and by the musical outcomes at the end of lessons
- ensuring that the curriculum:
 - is organised with a clear focus on improving the musical standards and understanding to be achieved by students as they progress through the school
 - provides students with sufficient depth and breadth of musical experiences, including opportunities to engage with music from different cultures and the world of professional music-making
- improving the leadership and management of music by:
 - providing the head of music with the necessary support and professional development to bring about the required improvements in provision and outcomes for students
 - improving partnerships with the local authority and other providers to tackle issues of professional and musical isolation.

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

As I explained previously, 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