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Mr W Marshall  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Marshall

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 18 and 19 March 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 six curriculum lessons and the 'Big Sing' concert; interviews with staff and the chair of governors; talking to selected students and partnership colleagues; scrutiny of relevant documentation; and analysis of students' work.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory, with good features including partnerships secured through specialist status. After a period of significant inconsistency in staffing and outcomes, a strong teaching team now works hard to promote students' engagement, enthusiasm and enjoyment in lessons. Previous inadequacies in Key Stage 4 have been remedied. These improvements, together with strong leadership from senior management, provide firm evidence of the school's capacity for sustaining further improvement in music. At present, however, students' achievement is satisfactory overall as a consequence of gaps in curriculum provision and satisfactory uptake of additional music opportunities.

## Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- When they join in Year 7, most students have enjoyed very positive experiences of music in their primary schools. Standards throughout Key Stage 3 remain broadly average and students make satisfactory progress. They do not achieve better than this because the curriculum does not give them sufficient opportunities to deepen their cultural understanding across the full range of musical experiences and the scheme of work does not set ambitious enough expectations of what should be achieved musically by the end of Key Stage 3.
- In Key Stage 4, standards in the GCSE examinations were low in 2007 and 2008, and students made inadequate progress. The BTEC First Certificate examination was taken by Year 11 students in 2009. The number of students passing was in line with national averages, and work seen during the inspection confirmed that students now in Year 11 are making satisfactory progress.

## Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Lessons are very well-organised. Working relationships are outstanding and students enjoy participating in the practical activities that feature at the heart of every lesson.
- Students make good progress within most lessons in so far as the great majority complete the tasks set successfully. However, students do not make good progress over time because curriculum planning does not promote their long-term musical progression.
- It is positive that singing is included throughout Key Stage 3. However, this is as an activity rather than a vehicle for developing vocal skills. Typically, teachers focus on participation rather than challenging students to improve the quality and sophistication of their vocal work.
- Assessment is an emerging strength. Video and audio recordings are made regularly and used to capture students' work. There is some integrity in the use of the National Curriculum levels, although sometimes this is more reflective of the strength of students' participation rather than the depth of their musical response.

## Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum was reorganised in September 2009. New schemes of work were written, incorporating a combined approach with drama in Year 9 with the intention of entering all students for the BTEC First Certificate Performing Arts examination. While the units of work are written in detail to provide clear guidance on the content and activities of

each unit, over the course of Key Stage 3, there is insufficient breadth in the coverage of different musical styles and genres. In particular, there is not enough attention given to Western art music genres, or to non-Western musical styles. Too much is predicated on popular music styles. Similarly, it is not clear how students are expected to progress from one project to another so that they achieve higher standards in their musical understanding by the end of Year 9.

- The Key Stage 4 BTEC course is well organised. There has been good attention to considering how the different units of work might be adapted to suit students' different abilities and interests but also to broaden their experience. For example, the unit on 'making and promoting a musical product' has been linked to an opera production for both regional and international performances.
- The range of additional tuition and ensemble activities is satisfactory, although, as with the Key Stage 3 curriculum, all large ensembles are focused on popular music styles.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- Day-to-day management of the department is extremely efficient and thoroughly professional. There is excellent attention to health and safety issues and the well-equipped department is in good order.
- The assistant headteacher, who leads the specialist school status, brings tremendous energy and enthusiasm to the post and has brokered some excellent partnerships. Since your appointment, you have acted decisively to strengthen the music teaching team. Support is excellent for the two new teachers as they settle into the school. Self-evaluation recognises these strengths, but also recognises that there are areas of music provision and outcomes for students that require improvement.
- The music scholars and lead learners play an important part in the leadership of music, and are excellent ambassadors within the school and wider communities. Their work has rightly earned national recognition. There are over 100 music assemblies during the school year and these help students across the school to develop their audience skills, as well as presenting a wider range of musical styles.

#### Subject issue: inclusion

- Participation rates in additional music tuition and in extra-curricular activities are satisfactory. It is very encouraging that all groups of students are represented in these opportunities, and that some are able to enjoy excellent extended opportunities and achieve very high standards. For these students, music makes an outstanding contribution to their personal development. Nevertheless, the numbers taking part fall well short of those projected when the school was awarded specialist status, and overall musical standards in these activities are broadly average.

Subject issue: partnerships

- Partnership work is a real strength of the music specialism. There are excellent links with feeder schools, drawing on the strengths of Humphry Davy School teachers and lead learners as well as the strengths of the primary teachers. Events, such as the 'Big Sing', create good understanding between schools, involve community groups, such as the local, nationally known, male voice choir, as well as providing opportunities to involve parents and carers. There are good partnerships with other specialist music colleges, specialist music schools and professional groups, although particular groups of students consistently gain considerably more benefit from these opportunities than others.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the Key Stage 3 curriculum to ensure that:
  - there is appropriate breadth and depth of coverage for all musical styles and genres, including Western art music styles and non-Western musical traditions
  - there is a clear articulation and promotion of the increasing standards of musical understanding that students are expected to achieve as they progress through the key stage, reflecting their prior experiences when they join the school
- raising the quality of singing through challenging teaching that helps students to improve their vocal work, rather than just encouraging their participation
- increasing the proportion of students regularly participating in additional musical tuition and ensembles by:
  - providing a more diverse range of activities, particularly in styles other than popular music
  - investigating the organisation of instrumental teaching lessons, and the reasons why some students choose not to continue with their learning.

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