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Mrs J Mortimore  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Mortimore

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 10 and 11 March 2010 to look at work in music.

As outlined in my 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; a meeting with a peripatetic music teacher; talking to selected students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work and visits to four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. Leaders have identified clearly the necessary priorities to be undertaken so that music provision can be further developed. A good start has been made which is recognised and appreciated by the students.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Historically, a below average proportion of students has taken GCSE music. They have generally attained or exceeded their target grades. An increasing number of students in Years 10 and 11 are currently studying music and more have already chosen music as one of their option subjects next year. Lesson observations and school data indicate that the current

Year 11 students are making faster progress than previously in most areas of study; however their vocal work is less well developed compared with that seen nationally.

- Musical standards when students start school are varied. They include some whose attainment is above that seen nationally, but overall is broadly average. By the end of Year 9, standards remain broadly average and students make satisfactory progress. However, because of changes to the curriculum, the current Year 9 students who have chosen to study music are making faster progress than before, especially in their understanding of musical styles and creating their compositions.
- A broadly satisfactory and similar number of boys and girls receive instrumental lessons with all groups of students represented. Senior students especially welcome the opportunity to use the music facilities out of lesson time and the additional help they are given when preparing for examinations. However, they are correct in their view that, at present, there are insufficient extra-curricular activities and ensembles. Leaders recognise this and are actively considering how they can be increased.

#### Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Working relationships between teachers and students are positive and students cooperate and support each other well in lessons. All lessons observed included practical music-making opportunities, often through short focused tasks. However, in some lessons, too much time is spent on verbal explanation and this restricts students' active engagement in music.
- The positive features of the best lessons were those taught at a lively pace, activities being well-sequenced, musical skills developed progressively and students understanding what they had to do. Helpful questioning and detailed comments in students' books are used well so that students can evaluate their own work, giving precise musical reasons why they work has been successful and how they can improve it further.
- Where learning was less effective, students were not always prepared sufficiently for the task set and so progress was limited. There was insufficient recognition of the ability of students and the set tasks did not provide sufficient challenge or development, especially, but not exclusively, for the more able.
- The school recognises that audio recordings of students' work are not a common feature of lessons.

#### Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Appropriate revisions are being made to the schemes of work, so that the curriculum meets the needs and interests of the students more adequately. These changes are also ensuring that the topics covered during Key Stage 3 link more appropriately to the GCSE course. New units

have been written and they are providing a more coherent development of students' musical skills, knowledge and understanding. However, the school is aware that singing does not feature as regularly as other aspects of music learning, such as composing and performing.

- Currently there are few extra-curricular activities; however, links with other arts subjects, especially drama, are providing opportunities for students to explore musical theatre.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- Improving music provision is important to the school. Senior leaders, together with the subject leader for performing arts, are providing very good support, guidance and training to the music teacher as he develops his teaching and leadership roles. Relevant training has been undertaken and more is planned. Firm foundations have been established to develop provision, such as revisions to the curriculum and implementing appropriate assessments.
- Senior leaders are aware of the need to consolidate and evaluate the good start that has been made and also to involve more students in music activities. The points for development identified during the inspection confirm those already identified by the school.

#### Subject issue: inclusion

- Analysis revealed that additional instrumental lessons involve a similar number of boys and girls. At present, more boys than girls choose to study music at GCSE level, but all groups are represented.
- Revisions to the curriculum are ensuring that work is better matched to the needs of students of differing abilities and prior attainment.

#### Subject issue: partnerships

- The school has developed some effective links with the local authority music service to provide students with a choice of instrumental lessons and to play in rock groups after school.
- Links have also been established with other secondary schools and the county music adviser to provide helpful support and guidance for the music staff. However, the school recognises that links with primary schools are currently underdeveloped.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- making learning more consistent in lessons by:
  - providing effective feedback to students which enables them to understand the musical actions they need to take to improve their work

- using prior knowledge of students' differing abilities to provide appropriate challenge in lessons
  - making and using audio recordings of students' work more frequently
- completing the scheme of work review to ensure that all music skills are taught regularly and covered in sufficient depth, including singing
  - maintaining support for the music staff as they develop their roles.

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

Marianne Young  
Her Majesty's Inspector