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Mr K Deadman
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Deadman

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 February 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 with selected students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; visits to six lessons; and observing a singing group rehearsal.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. Students are engaged and motivated by lively teaching which includes good opportunities to involve them directly in practical music making. Most of the students, who are involved in the many additional ensembles run by the music staff, thoroughly enjoy and benefit significantly from the chance to perform before different audiences in school, the local community and during the bi-annual music visits to Europe.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- The proportion of students taking the GCSE music course in Key Stage 4 is above average. Music results in 2009 were above the national average standard and these students made good progress. Since 2008, a number of students take the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE) level 2 Certificate in music technology and all have passed.
- Musical standards when students start school are mixed but generally below average. By the end of Year 9, standards are average. Students make good progress overall.
- Good standards are attained in extra-curricular activities with high-quality performances being achieved in instrumental ensembles, whole-school musical events and especially the senior girls' 'Harmony' singing group. The school recognises the need to increase the involvement of boys, particularly in singing groups. Students report that the department is a happy and friendly place. They very much appreciate the time given by all the music staff to ensure that the students are able to follow their musical ambitions and interests.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Lessons are lively and taught at a good pace which engages students well. Recordings are used effectively to support learning so that students can recognise where their compositions and performances can be improved.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very constructive. In this positive climate, students focus well on their learning and enjoy their music making as a result of lively and engaging teaching. Occasionally, noise levels are too high which makes it difficult for students to hear when working in groups.
- Teachers identify clearly what students are intended to learn and plan well-sequenced learning activities. Assessment is integrated into lessons and students benefit well from encouraging comments and suggestions to help them understand how to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- The curriculum is directly relevant to students' needs and interests. It is varied and includes a wide range of musical styles. The introduction of alternative qualifications at Key Stage 4 is welcomed by students, especially by those considering different aspects of the music industry as a career choice or further musical study. However, the school recognises that singing does not feature as regularly as other aspects of music learning such as composition.
- The curriculum is enhanced well through a good range of extra-curricular activities, some of which have been introduced in response to student suggestions. Students enjoy the opportunities to go on international tours and to perform in different venues.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- Music, as a specialist subject, is seen as an important part of the school. There is an accurate view of the provision and a clear understanding of areas for development. Music is supported well by senior leaders. Very effective use is made of specialist status funding and other monies to develop music provision, support some students and improve resources, especially for new courses.
- Teachers work very well as a team, giving generously of their time, sharing ideas and introducing additional activities and events despite the rather cramped accommodation and storage facilities.
- Monitoring of the department is undertaken regularly but at present describes what the department has achieved rather than measuring how provision improves students' attainment and progress.

Subject issue: inclusion

- All students have good access to a wide range of opportunities within the curriculum. Work is well matched to students' differing needs and prior attainment.
- Analysis of students involved in additional instrumental lessons and activities revealed that more girls than boys take part in ensembles, especially within the choirs. However, a similar number, including those from other groups, choose to study music at GCSE level.

Subject issue: partnerships

- The school has developed some good links with the local authority music service to provide students with a good choice of instrumental lessons.
- Some performance events are provided for feeder primary schools, such as the recent primary music day. Active consideration is being given so that these links and occasional music days can be further developed to include extended curriculum work for pupils in Year 6.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- finding ways to increase boys' participation in singing activities by increasing the variety and range of material used in vocal work
- building on the existing links with primary schools by developing more extended curriculum and instrumental activities.

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