

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



31 March 2010

Mrs C Mason
Headteacher
Brentwood County High School
Seven Arches Road
Brentwood
Essex
CM4 4JF

Dear Mrs Mason

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 22 and 23 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: interviews with staff and selected students; observations of eight lessons and the Senior Choir rehearsal; scrutiny of relevant documentation; and analysis of students' work.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. Teaching of individual lessons is broadly satisfactory and musical leadership of the extra-curricular groups is good. Since December 2009, temporary arrangements have been in place for a qualified music teacher to cover some classes. The school hopes to make a permanent appointment for September 2010. However, standards are low as a result of an unsatisfactory curriculum and poor management, particularly of the GCSE music course.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Overall, standards are low throughout Key Stage 3. Taking account of students' abilities and prior experiences when they join Year 7, this represents inadequate progress. There are significant gaps in their musical development, including their use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Students taking GCSE music made inadequate progress in 2007 and again in 2008, when standards were extraordinarily low. A much smaller group took GCSE music in 2009, and they made satisfactory progress. However, scrutiny of current Year 11 students' work revealed that, with just a few weeks to go before coursework deadlines, they are significantly behind with their work and it is not at the expected standard.
- The proportions of students participating in additional instrumental and vocal lessons or extra-curricular music activities in the school are low, especially in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Others learn to play instruments outside school, but a significant number of these are not involved in school music.
- Students taking the A-level music course make satisfactory progress. It is to the school's credit that this course option is maintained, despite the very small numbers involved.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is broadly satisfactory.

- The head of department is an outstanding musician. His skills are used well to give good musical leadership to the extra-curricular performance groups and provide well-informed musical guidance to individual students in Key Stages 4 and 5. These students rightly praise the commitment and musical expertise that he offers.
- Individual lessons are planned diligently and most feature practical music-making activities which are efficiently organised. While these are enjoyed by most students, too often they are driven and shaped by written instructions and worksheets. Consequently, while most students manage to make some sort of positive response, the musical and creative quality of their work is limited. This is also a reason the behaviour of some students deteriorates in Key Stage 3 classes.
- It is very positive that audio recordings are made in Key Stage 3 to help students and their teachers assess their work.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is based on a published scheme. The publisher's broad course outline is used to give an overview, but this has not been adapted to meet the school's and the students' particular requirements or to give a clear, detailed sense of their musical progression. At present, the course is only being followed by Years 7 and

8. Students in Year 9 are offered a selection of activities from the other two years, as the school has yet to purchase the final set of resources.

- There is a broad plan in place for the new GCSE specification that started in September 2009. While this plan gives an appropriate timescale for the course, it is clear that over the past three years there has been a lack of timeliness in planning and completing major pieces of coursework. Consequently, a significant number of the current Year 11 students have yet to complete any of the three of the main coursework areas. At this late stage, this is putting undue pressure on these students and also on teachers. It is essential that these processes are better managed in future, particularly in light of the introduction of time-limited conditions for completing controlled-assessment coursework.
- ICT resources are insufficient. Consequently, statutory requirements for using ICT in music in Key Stage 3 are not met. GCSE students are absolutely right to complain that the lack of ICT resources holds them back from producing the high-quality work that should be expected.
- Accommodation is just adequate, although the location of the class teaching and practice rooms makes it difficult for music teachers to work closely with other arts faculty colleagues.
- A reasonable range of extra-curricular activities is available, although take-up is low and the repertoire covered does not meet the interests of all groups of students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- While there are notable strengths that the head of department brings to the school as a musician, there are shortcomings in curriculum management that have prevented students from making satisfactory or better progress. Key issues, such as the lack of ICT and underachievement at GCSE, have not been tackled thoroughly enough by leaders, including senior leaders. Consequently, students continue to underachieve.
- The instrumental teaching programme is administered by a member of the office support staff, which takes some pressure away from the head of department. However, insufficient use is made of other teachers' skills and expertise to manage a stronger, more diverse range of extra-curricular activities, and thus leave the head of department to focus on the overall vision for the department and the quality of the curriculum provision.

Subject issue: inclusion

- Despite the small numbers involved, it is positive that students from all groups – including those who are looked-after – are represented in musical activities.

Subject issue: partnerships

- Partnership with the local authority music service is good. GCSE music students benefit from attending concerts in London, and there are some links with local music groups, such as the Royal British Legion Band. The school was recently chosen to host a masterclass as part of the Department for Children, Schools and Families' 'Tune In – Year of Music' initiative.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring, as a matter of urgency, that Year 11 students and teachers are given support to ensure that all coursework is completed by the deadline of 5 May 2010 and to the best standard possible
- ensuring that subsequently there are thorough strategies in place for the management of controlled-assessments with the current Year 10, so that all students are able to complete the tasks to time and to a good standard
- ensuring that, by 1 September 2010, sufficient ICT resources are in place to support all current Year 10 students with their GCSE coursework and to meet statutory requirements for ICT in Key Stage 3
- adapting the published scheme of work for Key Stage 3 so that it meets the particular needs of the students in this school from the time they arrive through to the end of Year 9
- increasing the numbers of students regularly participating in additional musical ensembles by:
 - widening and developing the leadership of these groups, in partnership with the local authority music service
 - developing a broader and more inclusive repertoire for these groups
 - enabling the participation of those who receive additional tuition whether inside or outside school.

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