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Mr J Wilding
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Wilding

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 8 and 9 June 2010 to look at work in music.

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, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work, and observation of two lessons and the 'Franklee' singing group. A discussion was also held with an assistant headteacher from a neighbouring secondary school.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. Music was reintroduced to the Key Stage 3 timetable from September 2009 after a period of two years when there was no music teacher. During this time, however, the school continued to provide individual instrumental lessons. Also, in September 2009 a small group of Year 10 students started the BTEC First Certificate music course which was chosen to best meet their needs.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are exceptionally low in all aspects of music learning. This is because these students have not had music lessons in previous years. Mostly they enjoy completing the tasks set for them but fail to make progress within lessons or throughout the year because they have no prior musical knowledge to use to create their own musical ideas.
- No students took GCSE music in 2009.

- A similar number of boys and girls, from all ability groups receive instrumental lessons. There are, however, few opportunities for them to perform together in ensembles out of lesson time.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Students in Years 7 and 8 are taught similar topics, with practical music-making activities planned into lessons. Observations indicated that students are generally keen to be involved in music. Although students' work is assessed regularly and targets are set, insufficient use is made of this information and insufficient account is taken of students' individual abilities when lessons are planned. Musical content and activities are taught in isolation, which makes it difficult for students to make connections between different areas of music learning. Too often, students' first responses are accepted readily and overgenerous praise is used which fails to correct mistakes or challenge them to produce better quality work. Consequently, they do not make the expected progress.
- Students are encouraged to perform to their peers and learn from their mistakes. However, very little use is made of audio recordings and information and communication technology (ICT) as a way of recording students' work because of a lack of resources.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- Students in Key Stage 3 receive music lessons once a fortnight. This means that students can go for a considerable length of time between lessons. As a result, progress is slow as they are unable to practice and revisit musical skills frequently.
- No detailed scheme of work is in place for students in either Key Stage 3 or 4. Currently, published schemes of work are used which are starting to be adapted to meet individual students' interests and needs. However, this work has yet to be completed. Consequently, no long-term planning takes place to systematically develop key musical skills and understanding to make up for the period of musical inactivity. No computers or software programs are available in the music department and students are unable to explore this aspect of music learning. As a result, the curriculum does not meet statutory requirements.
- Accommodation is being improved to provide more practice and individual instrumental teaching rooms. The school recognises that resources are inadequate and the legacy of underinvestment has to be overcome.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- You and your senior colleagues coordinate the leadership of the department and have a realistic view of its effectiveness. Leaders are open and honest about what needs to be done to improve provision further. Together you have a clear and determined vision to improve students' learning and ensure music has a much higher profile within the school. To that end there has been some good financial investment, such as paying for individual instrumental lessons, and more is planned.
- Provision has been monitored very thoroughly since September 2009 to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current provision and the need to develop particular areas. As a result, specialist subject support is provided through the very good partnership with a neighbouring school. Opportunities are provided for staff to benefit from training and national initiatives; these are yet to impact on students' progress and attainment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- completing the curriculum planning for both key stages by July 2010 ensuring that:
 - the Key Stage 3 curriculum meets all statutory requirements, including for ICT
 - all planning shows clearly the musical progress students should make as they move through the school.
- improving the quality of teaching by:
 - significantly increasing expectations of the musical quality in lessons, in relation to the standard and content of work and by the musical outcomes at the end of lessons, to reduce the legacy of underachievement
 - using audio recordings regularly so that students evaluate and understand what they need to do to make progress
 - using assessment information to plan more musically challenging lessons that meet students' individual needs and interests
- maintaining the close monitoring of provision already in place, and the external specialist subject support as needed.

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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector