

24 September 2008

Mr D Tristram  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Tristram

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 15 - 16 September 2008. At the end of the inspection I fed back my judgements and this letter is to confirm my findings.

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 every student is benefiting from your music provision. It also explored the links you have developed with other schools and agencies.

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 unless to highlight exceptional practice. In such circumstances the school would be contacted prior to publication to agree the exact wording. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: discussions with members of staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. There are strengths in the good range of additional experiences provided by the school and in the progress made in some lessons. However, students do not always make as much progress as they could.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory.

- Standards in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are lower than the national averages but students are making steady progress. The numbers taking these courses are broadly average.

- Standards in Key Stage 3 are below expectations and the progress students make varies across classes. While achievement overall is satisfactory, as students generally join the school with underdeveloped musical skills, more progress could be made in some lessons.
- Students are involved well in a range of additional experiences including an Arts Week and Festival. They benefit from free instrumental lessons and the opportunity to take part in the Saturday morning music school led by the Music Service.

### Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Students enjoy the relaxed atmosphere created by the music department and the friendly relationships they have with their teachers. However, they are right in asking for more consistent management of behaviour as there are occasions when some students lose interest and disrupt the learning of the rest of the class. They are also correct in feeling they could be challenged more.
- Students made most progress where there was a clear focus for the learning and all knew what they needed to do to improve their work. This was seen clearly in the lesson where students made effective use of the criteria for assessment to check what they needed to do to reach a higher level.
- In less effective lessons, while there was an overarching learning focus this was not defined clearly enough for students so that they did not know what they were expected to achieve or how they could improve their responses. This lack of clarity, together with uncertainty about expected behaviour, led to slow progress.

### Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The quality of the curriculum and extra-curricular provision is satisfactory overall.

- The content of the curriculum is planned well and described clearly through the good curriculum map and summaries of the units of work in Key Stage 3. There is also clear planning for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. However, there is insufficient detail about progression within and across the Key Stage 3 programme.
- There is a good range of extra-curricular activities but the reduction of the lunch break to two half-hour breaks has meant that these have to take place largely after school. Committed students understandably want to enjoy the variety but this means that they have to try to balance attendance at the different events. This makes it very difficult for staff and students to make consistent progress.

### Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory overall.

- You have a clear vision for music as an important part of the school curriculum and provide good support for additional opportunities. However, past monitoring has not ensured there is sufficient consistency in the quality of teaching for all students to make the progress of which they are capable.

- The subject leader has good ideas and is developing good practice such as in the use of baseline assessment and the tracking of students' progress.
- The school hosts a Saturday morning music school which provides good opportunities for the students who play in these groups. Other students would also welcome hearing these groups perform to the rest of the school.
- The school is aware of the need to improve provision further so that it reflects the specialist status given to the performing arts.

Subject issue:

#### Inclusion

- The school provides instrumental lessons free of charge to students although parents pay for a second instrument when requested. This provides excellent opportunity for all students. However, the school is aware of the need to ensure those who would benefit most, musically and personally, are involved. This includes re-examining selection procedures and exploring different types of provision, not just individual and paired lessons but also larger group and whole class tuition.
- The school is also aware of the need for more analysis of progress and take-up of additional experiences to ensure all benefit fully from the music provision.
- The introduction of BTEC in Key Stage 4 has provided appropriate opportunities for some students to continue their study of music. The subject leader is right in constantly evaluating the provision at Key Stage 4 so that GCSE is also offered when this is appropriate.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- giving a renewed sense of urgency to increasing consistency in the quality of teaching so students make more musical progress
- defining expectations in the scheme of work so that teachers and students know what is expected and to improve work
- building on the good range of opportunities provided by making sure they meet the needs of all students through, for example, exploring different types of instrumental provision and finding ways to enable more regular attendance at extra-curricular activities.

I very much hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in your school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

In 6-12 months after the inspection visit, we would like to gather information on the impact of this inspection on the improvements in this subject in your school. To this end you may be contacted by telephone or sent a questionnaire to complete. We appreciate your co-operation in this evaluation.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Knight  
Her Majesty's Inspector