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Mr A Powell
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Powell

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 9 and 10 February 2011 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff, students and parents; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of nine lessons, a choir rehearsal and a year group assembly.

The overall effectiveness of music is outstanding.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- Students make good progress in relation to their starting points and, by the end of Year 8, standards are in line with national expectations for the end of Key Stage 3. The proportion of students studying music or music technology in Key Stage 4 is well above average. Standards in music at the end of Year 11 are high, with students making good progress, and in many cases outstanding progress, across all aspects of the subject. In the music technology course, many students make exceptional progress in developing skills such as sequencing, multi-tracking and audio editing.
- Large numbers of students are involved in extra-curricular activities and instrumental or vocal lessons. The varied range of activities enables

students with different interests and aptitudes to be involved and achieve well.

- The personal development of students is good. Their positive attitudes to learning ensure that they engage positively in music activities. They are confident, very well behaved, and collaborate well with each other and with adults.
- Good numbers study music and music technology in the sixth form where recent A-level results have been in line with national expectations. Students are currently making good progress and their standards are above average. Students in Year 12, for example, showed a depth of musical understanding when listening to and discussing a challenging vocal piece by Luciano Berio. Students in the sixth form are mature and reflective; they accept responsibility confidently and make a good contribution to the musical life of the college, including by leading music activities with younger students.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Teaching is often lively and dynamic, and engages students well in first-hand involvement with music. In most cases, lessons involve them in well-sequenced musical activities which enable them to develop good musical understanding. In a small minority of cases, however, planning does not identify precisely enough the learning that is intended. Consequently, opportunities are lost to develop students' understanding of how to improve their work.
- Recorded music and video extracts are often used well to relate students' own work to that of other composers and professional musicians. Information and communication technology is used effectively to support learning, particularly for students in Year 9 and upwards where many become highly skilled in using new music technologies to support their creative work.
- Teachers identify how students are progressing, including through the use of recordings of their work, and use this information well to plan subsequent work. Good opportunities are provided through extension activities and other special arrangements to challenge more able students, while providing good support for those with more limited musical experiences.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is outstanding.

- The curriculum provides an outstanding range of opportunities for students of different experiences and aptitudes to be involved in music and music technology, especially in Key Stage 4, where an accredited course in music technology complements the GCSE music course.

Although students in Key Stage 3 now have only two years in which to develop their musical understanding as set out in the National Curriculum, the opportunities for the good number of students who opt for music in Year 9 and beyond provide very well for their wide range of musical needs and interests.

- The scheme of work for music in Key Stage 3 includes a good range of musical styles and cultures. Good opportunities for students to sing are provided throughout the key stage. Through its current review of the scheme, the department has rightly recognised the need to identify more precisely what students are expected to achieve by the end of each unit.
- The college provides an outstanding range of instrumental and vocal tuition and extra-curricular activities. Some ensembles are aimed at students with particular musical skills while others are open to all, regardless of their previous involvement in or experience of music. The department has identified further developments in extra-curricular activities such as increasing opportunities for choral work. The staff choir provides a good role model and an opportunity to draw together different aspects of the college's community.
- Links with the local authority music service benefit many students through specialist tuition and other opportunities within and beyond the college. Partnerships with professional musicians and organisations bring further expertise to enhance opportunities. The involvement of the college's Samba Band plays an important part in helping to develop community cohesion.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- Senior leaders and the subject leader have a very clear vision for music and an understanding of appropriate strategies to ensure that it is accessible to all. Well-targeted actions have been taken to improve access and systematically raise achievement. The changes to the organisation of the whole-school curriculum have enabled very good arrangements to be put in place to ensure that the needs of a wide range of students from Year 9 onwards are met, including through the implementation of suitable accredited courses alongside GCSE and A-level provision.
- Effective self-evaluation, including detailed analysis of examination results, has supported the department in identifying specific areas for improvement in order to raise attainment. This led, for example, to targeted action to improve the quality of teaching in the listening aspects of the GCSE examination. As a result, these standards have risen significantly and are now similar to the high standards consistently attained in composing and performing.
- The college's good capacity for sustained improvement is reflected in, for example, actions taken to broaden the music curriculum, increase students' involvement in music in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form while also focusing strongly on raising standards.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- building on current strengths and raising the quality of teaching to outstanding by:
 - defining more explicitly what students are expected to achieve by the end of each unit in the scheme of work
 - identifying simply and precisely what students are expected to learn in lessons.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

David Williams
Additional Inspector