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Mr G Walker
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Dear Mr Walker

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 7 and 8 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: discussions with staff and selected students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of four lessons, one of which was jointly observed, individual instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. Although aspects of the music department's work have been revitalised since September 2010 both within the school and the local community, there remain significant weaknesses in curriculum provision and students' achievements in Key Stage 3. Students taking examination courses in Key Stages 4 and 5 make good progress, although here too there are weaknesses in curriculum planning.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- An above-average proportion of students study GCSE music, however there are fewer students in the current Year 10 compared to previous years. Standards at the end of Year 11 are above average. Students' attainment is similar in all parts of the GCSE examination and progress overall is good.
- However, in Key Stage 3, standards remain below average, because of the weaknesses in the planned curriculum, particularly in the students' use of

information and communication technology (ICT) and the development of their musical skills as they move through the key stage. Standards in singing are lower than that expected because it has only recently become an integral part of music lessons. As a result, although students make satisfactory progress in individual lessons, overall, taking into account their abilities and prior experiences when they join in Year 7, they make inadequate progress by the end of Year 9.

- Students studying music at A level make good progress, particularly in the A2 examination.
- The proportion of students participating in additional instrumental and vocal lessons and/or extra-curricular activities has increased significantly since September 2010 and is now broadly satisfactory. Leaders recognise that currently many more girls than boys benefit from these opportunities. Visiting instrumental teachers and other staff help to lead some of the ensembles. Their time and effort, together with that given by the music staff, is appreciated by students as it helps them to realise their musical ambitions.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Teachers are talented musicians, modelling ideas and techniques successfully in lessons and showing good enthusiasm for music. Some good teaching was observed, especially for older students. In these lessons, students are encouraged to develop their enquiry skills and make musical connections between pieces of information, for example when writing essays.
- In Key Stage 3, students spend time completing worksheets to record the activities they have completed which means there are limited opportunities for them either to contribute suggestions or evaluate their work musically. Although questioning is evident, at times, lessons are overdirected by teachers. Singing is often a starter activity but it is not always linked effectively to the learning taking part in the main part of the lesson.
- Helpful assessment is given in lessons to encourage and motivate students, however evaluating the progress they make, either through the use of audio recordings or by students measuring their own work against national criteria and thus making musical improvements, is underdeveloped.
- Regular teaching for students in the Strategically Resourced Provision for Autism, including using well-chosen resources and other materials, enhances successfully their enjoyment of and participation in music.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- The scheme of work for students in Years 7 to 9 is underdeveloped. A lack of appropriate resources for ICT means that this important aspect of music

learning is not included and statutory requirements are not met. Students are right to identify the lack of music from different cultures however more are now being introduced into lessons. Ensuring that an appropriate scheme of work is in place throughout Key Stage 3 is a key area for improvement, so students are able to understand music in an appropriate broad variety of musical contexts.

- There is a broad plan in place that follows the examination syllabus for students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, ensuring that all requirements are covered. Although some additional material is indicated to augment these requirements, leaders recognise that more is needed.
- The number and variety of extra-curricular music ensembles have increased markedly in the last six months. Students report that they welcome these and the opportunity to make music together. However, at present, these ensembles do not include all groups and abilities of students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- Senior leaders recognise the improvements in extra-curricular provision and students' enjoyment of music that have been made in a short time since the head of department took up post in September 2010. Concerts are promoted widely and the department works smoothly; good teamwork is evident. In this respect, together with singing activities forged with the local primary schools, the head of department has successfully achieved the initial goals set for him by senior leaders. This approach, plus his consideration of future plans, leads to confidence that provision can improve.
- Cosmetic improvements have been made to the music rooms, but more are needed especially to provide storage for students' instruments and those belonging to the school. Information from training courses for the examination syllabus is being shared in order to ensure consistent marking across the department. Active consideration is being given to the worth and validity of the music aptitude test for students when they join the school, currently it does not judge their musical skills and abilities.
- Despite these developments, however, insufficient attention has been given to the curriculum provision for students in years 7 to 9 and, as a result, they do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- carrying out improvements to the curriculum by:
 - ensuring that students' musical skills are planned systematically through Years 7 to 9
 - making certain that sufficient resources for ICT are available so that all statutory requirements are met
 - ensuring that music from other cultures is represented

- including more detail and clarity, beyond the basic syllabus requirements, about what students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are to learn in lessons
- strengthening the quality of teaching by:
 - using audio recordings as a learning tool so that students can understand how to improve their work and not just record that they have completed the tasks set
 - implementing appropriate assessment methods to measure students' attainment when they start in year 7 and the progress they make as they move through the school
- ensuring that senior leaders support and challenge the head of department to identify and accomplish priorities which impact directly on students' attainment and involvement in extra-curricular activities.

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

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector