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Mr S Tong  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Tong

### **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 16 and 17 March 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 and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six class lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. There has been considerable instability in music provision over recent years. The previous head of department left in July 2009, with the new subject leader joining the school in January 2010. Since then, significant periods of staff illness and absence have stalled efforts to improve provision and outcomes for students. However, last year, commendable efforts were made to secure the achievements of Year 11 students taking the GCSE music examination. Although the department has only recently returned to full staffing, you recognise that vulnerabilities and weaknesses remain in all areas of provision and that, overall, students' achievement is inadequate.

### **Achievement in music**

- In 2010, Year 11 students attained below average standards, which represented satisfactory progress in the context of their overall abilities. The standard of work produced by current GCSE music students is low. Composing work is mechanical and simplistic, reflecting students' limited performing skills. Similarly, listening work is underdeveloped.

- The standard of work in Key Stage 3 is also low. Students' understanding of musical cultural contexts is shallow and narrow; there is limited evidence of them having developed their musical understanding through composing work.
- There are very small numbers benefiting from additional instrumental or vocal tuition. Similarly, not enough students benefit from participation in extra-curricular music activities. It is, however, commendable that within these small numbers, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are represented equally.

### **Quality of teaching in music**

- A significant amount of teaching over the past two years has been provided by a succession of temporary staff.
- Permanent teachers and the department's teaching assistant are capable musicians and are able to model ideas with confidence and authority. However, not enough use is made of this teaching technique to help develop students' musical understanding; too much emphasis is placed on written and spoken instruction and on students' completion of written worksheets. One consequence of this approach is the poor behaviour in some lessons, which is caused by a slow pace of teaching and learning. In the lessons observed, students' behaviour and attitudes improved when they became musically active and involved, rather than sitting listening to the teacher's presentation.
- Lessons are organised professionally and always feature a variety of starter, main and plenary activities. Too often, though, these activities are not linked sufficiently to give a sense of progression or to link listening, composing and performing tasks together to reinforce students' musical understanding.
- A set of laptops are used by Year 10 and 11 students but there is little evidence of students using information and communication technology (ICT) appropriately in Key Stage 3. GCSE compositions are created using step-wise sequencing, rather than making use of real-time technology. There is no facility to make digital recordings which further restricts the quality of students' musical responses.
- Audio recordings are not made of students' work, so opportunities for them to listen to and appraise their practical music-making are missed.

### **Quality of the curriculum in music**

- A start has been made on revising schemes of work, but these remain incomplete. An overview of the Key Stage 3 curriculum indicates coverage of an appropriate range of musical styles, traditions and genres but there is no planning to show how students' musical understanding is to develop as they progress from Years 7 to 9.
- The head of department has started a small choir and efforts are being made to establish an instrumental group. However, at present only small

numbers participate in these groups. There is an annual musical theatre production which attracts a greater number of students.

- Accommodation is sufficiently spacious and there is a satisfactory range of classroom instruments, but both would benefit from refurbishment. In particular, immediate action should be taken to repair keyboards with missing or broken keys.
- There is little partnership work with feeder primary schools and little awareness of the impact of the national 'Wider Opportunities' and singing strategies on students' achievements in music before they join in Year 7.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in music**

- The head of department has a good theoretical understanding of how students learn musically, through a holistic combination of listening, performing and composing activities. However, this understanding has yet to translate into practical application through teaching and the planned curriculum.
- There have been some improvements since January 2010, including the introduction of the choir and some notable achievements over the past year, such as securing satisfactory results for the 2010 GCSE students. Nevertheless, current students are right to express disappointment about the erratic provision they have experienced, and we agreed that a key priority must be to provide students with a period of stability in music, following the disruptions of the past two years.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- improving curriculum resources by:
  - undertaking, by June 2011, a complete audit of classroom instruments and carrying out a programme of repairs and refurbishments where necessary, particularly to keyboards
  - providing, by September 2011, suitable recording facilities for use by teachers and students, including through digital technology
- completing a scheme of work, by September 2011, that builds on students' musical experiences in primary schools and which shows, very clearly, how their musical understanding should develop as they progress through the school
- improving the quality of teaching, and consequently securing students' good attitudes and behaviour in all lessons, by:
  - ensuring that students are engaged promptly and consistently in musical learning and activity
  - ensuring that lesson activities are linked to promote and secure students' musical understanding
  - making more effective use of ICT, including through real-time sequencing and digital recording.

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

**Mark Phillips**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**