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Mr G Wadwa  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Wadwa

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: music**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 13 and 14 December 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; observation of six lessons, some jointly with a senior leader, and short visits to a seventh class lesson and two instrumental lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate.

#### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Students' attainment on entry is below average. Throughout Key Stage 3, they make inadequate progress in music, and by Year 9 their attainment is very low. Students' musical understanding, including those who are more able, is simplistic and unsophisticated.
- A higher than average proportion of students takes music at GCSE or BTEC and this includes a higher proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities than is usually seen. However, in 2010 and 2011, less than one in 10 GCSE students gained an A\* to C grade, which is exceptionally low. These students fared considerably worse in music than they did in their other subjects. The school expects

improvement in grades from previous years for the current Year 11 cohort. Even so, staff have correctly noted significant gaps in these students' musical knowledge, for example in their understanding of melodic and harmonic devices. The progress of current Year 10 GCSE students is inadequate. At BTEC, in 2011, all Year 11 students passed, with one receiving a merit. Some have continued on to an advanced BTEC music technology course in Year 12. They show competence in using computers and are expected to pass. However, their understanding of some essential musical elements, such as time signatures, is weak.

- Music has a very low profile in the school. Participation rates in extra-curricular activities are very low. Students have very few organised opportunities to sing or play instruments together, although a Key Stage 3 drum club is growing and some examination students attend after-school 'catch up' sessions. A below average proportion of students takes instrumental lessons, even though they are provided free of charge.

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

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Some teaching is satisfactory. For example, in a Year 12 music technology lesson, the teacher made suitable adaptations to tasks that met the needs of the students and ensured that those for whom English is an additional language had helpful support with technical vocabulary and in expressing their ideas. However, too many music lessons are paced too slowly and, for the most part, staff do not expect enough of the students. Teachers spend too long talking to the students, who become passive. Whole-school approaches to teaching are used but without the musical content to make them effective. Staff very rarely sing or play to their classes, and thus do not model musicianship.
- The school is seeking to improve the accuracy of assessments in music of students in all key stages. Nevertheless, activities in lessons are usually not well matched to students' needs. Work set is insufficiently musically demanding. In Year 10, staff are aware that students in both teaching groups have very low prior attainment. However, there is no systematic or consistent approach across the groups to try to remedy this.

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

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- Despite a well-constructed unit of work at the start of Year 7, and occasional interesting individual events, the curriculum at Key Stage 3 is not fit for purpose. There is no clear planning for progression in musical skills. Far too much use is made of undemanding worksheets throughout the key stage. Electronic keyboards are overused. While the curriculum is carefully linked to themes used across many subjects in Key Stage 3, such as 'conflict' in Year 8, the resulting musical activities are unchallenging and insufficiently related to other music units of work. These weaknesses make students inactive musical learners and lead to the low standards in Year 9.

- The Key Stage 4 scheme of work addresses examination requirements, but often superficially. For example, students' exposure to classical music is too limited. There is an excessive focus on rock and pop, at a simple level. The instrumental lessons provided for GCSE students are not linked sufficiently well to class lessons. In all key stages, students are not adequately helped to see the common ground between different musical styles, although the school has incorporated elements of world music.
- Singing is scarcely used by staff or students in lessons. Computers are readily available but are not always used well to help record and improve work or develop students' musical knowledge. Although the department has sufficient teaching space, practice rooms and acoustic instruments are not always accessible to support active, independent work.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is inadequate.

- You are aware of many of the problems within the music subject area and have begun to address them. For example, a partnership has started with a nearby music specialist school. This is at an early stage of development but has begun to raise aspirations. The new performing arts faculty enables sharing between subjects and gives support for the music subject leader but also reduces specific accountability for music. The subject's self-evaluation is too optimistic and, in some respects, the underperformance in music is hidden behind the performance of the faculty as a whole.
- Before this inspection, the school was not fully aware of the low standards at Key Stage 3 or the inadequacy of the teaching in music. This is partly because lesson observations focus closely on whether teachers adhere to whole-school policies but less on how students learn in and about music.
- The leadership in the subject is insufficiently ambitious, rigorous and well focused. The subject action plan is poorly constructed with insufficient focus on targets for improving students' outcomes. It lacks clear actions to reach these better outcomes within precise, rigorous timescales. There is only a limited relationship with other partners such as the Ealing Music Service and feeder primary schools.

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

- as a matter of urgency, providing a bridging unit of work to give current Year 10 students the necessary understanding of essential musical syntax such as metre and tonality, chords, chord sequences and form
- raising students' attainment at Key Stage 3 and GCSE to be broadly average, by:
  - improving subject teaching so that it is at least consistently satisfactory by the end of the autumn term 2012 and good by the end of the summer term 2013

- ensuring that teachers raise the pace of lessons; that they teach through music rather than by too much talk; that they model musicianship through singing and performance; and that they consistently enable students to undertake practical, active musical tasks, well matched to their needs
  - developing the subject schemes of work at both Key Stages 3 and 4 so that they build students’ musical skills progressively and coherently, with active, demanding and practical music making at the core
  - improving students’ understanding of a range of genres beyond rock and pop
  - enabling students to make wider use of a broader range of instruments
  - linking the content of instrumental lessons for GCSE students closely to their class lessons
- raising the profile of music throughout the school by:
    - establishing a wider range of extra-curricular activities, including singing and instrumental groups, with a much higher rate of participation than seen currently
    - increasing the number of students taking instrumental lessons, in a broader range of instruments, including orchestral instruments
- improving the leadership and management of the subject by:
    - ensuring that the subject action plan clearly articulates suitable actions, expectations and timescales for improvements to provision and outcomes, including rates of participation and significantly better musical teaching and learning
    - evaluating the success of the subject frequently and much more rigorously against these intended outcomes, so that appropriate action is quickly taken to deal with any slippage against targets
    - ensuring that lines of accountability for the subject are clear
    - continuing to develop appropriate partnerships to complement classroom provision.

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

As 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.

Yours sincerely

**Robin Hammerton**  
**Her Majesty’s Inspector**