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Mrs Sue Dunford
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Dear Mrs Dunford

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme 2006/7 – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit, on 22 and 23 November 2006. At the end of the inspection I fed back my judgements and this letter is to confirm my findings.

The purpose of this inspection was to evaluate the provision of music at your school. The visit provided much useful evidence for the next Ofsted reviews of music and the wider evaluation of developments in these subjects. Your school will not be named in any publication without your permission and most evidence will be used at a general level, to identify trends and issues for development.

Achievement and standards

Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards in Key Stage 4 are above average, and results at GCSE have been above the national average for each of the last three years. In the sample of Year 11 work, there were some imaginative and well structured compositions. In the Year 10 lesson observed, pupils demonstrated a reasonable understanding of Salsa rhythms and style. Pupils make satisfactory progress through the GCSE course.
- Attainment in Key Stage 3 is also above national expectations and their achievement is satisfactory given the above average standards on entry in Year 7. Teacher assessments in 2006 were a little generous. In a Year 7 lesson, pupils confidently described the mood of different pieces of music and were able to improvise and perform their own compositions to reflect different moods.

- In the sixth form, results at A-level have been below average, but students' achievements are satisfactory. Numbers taking the subject are very small and the school loses some able musicians to neighbouring institutions at the end of Year 11.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good. In particular, attitudes and participation rates in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities are very good. Pupils themselves said how much they enjoyed music, particularly the creative aspects of the subject. "*One of my favourite lessons*" was how several pupils described their work in music. However, work was not always purposeful, especially when as in a Year 10 lesson, pupils are not given enough guidance on how to approach the task.
- Pupils make good progress in their instrumental lessons and in extra curricular activities. Some high quality music making was observed and the performance of *The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba* by the senior string group had both energy and flair.
- Music makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. The peer support given, for example by one pupil to another with learning difficulties during the choir rehearsal was exemplary.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Although much teaching is good, it is not consistently so. At its best, teaching is imaginatively planned with well chosen activities which both inspire and motivate the pupils. A good variety of musical examples are chosen well to illustrate specific points. The Year 7 lesson on creating moods in music was particularly effective in using the expertise of some able pupils to model techniques. Pupils listened attentively and contributed their ideas generously. The result was some imaginative and well structured compositions.
- Some teaching is inadequate because pupils are not given enough guidance on what to do and how to achieve it. Learning is not broken down into manageable steps, particularly for the less able and ongoing assessment is not used with sufficient rigour to provide effective feedback to pupils on how well they are doing and how they might improve. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, pupils failed to make the progress they should because the teacher's interventions did not offer enough guidance or prompt more developed work.

Quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is good.

- There is a good range of experiences in the taught curriculum and the department has worked successfully to widen pupils' opportunities since the

last inspection. There is an extensive range of extra-curricular groups which provide good opportunities for pupils to develop ensemble skills. Some pupils' experience is further enhanced through attendance at the local Saturday morning music school and in county ensembles. Overall, the curriculum is well planned to meet the needs and interests of all pupils.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory.

- The subject is ably led by an experienced head of department who has ensured that above average standards and the high level of extra-curricular activities have been maintained.
- However formal and regular monitoring has not been undertaken, although systems are now in place. As a result, self-evaluation of the work of the department is not fully developed. The school's faculty structure has tended to isolate music in the recent past, although this has now been addressed.

Overall effectiveness of the subject

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory with some good aspects particularly in relation to the high levels of participation in music activities, and the provision for the more able musicians.

Subject issues

- Data collection and its use are satisfactory. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked and assessments against clear criteria are regularly made. While links to National Curriculum levels are made, some moderation of teacher assessments at Key Stage 3 would ensure these are more accurate. Very little data is collected from primary schools about pupils' musical attainment on entry, although records of pupils who learn instruments through the county music service are passed on.
- The school is making good use of partnerships with others to extend and enrich its music provision. Good links are made with the county music service and the use of specialist visiting teachers to run school choirs and other ensembles is particularly valuable.

Inclusion

- The department is committed to inclusion, and a good proportion, around one in five pupils, are involved in instrumental lessons and in the musical life of the school more generally.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- monitoring the work of the department more regularly to ensure more consistently good teaching
- ensuring all lessons have a clear learning objective and pupils are given enough guidance and support to enable all of them to achieve well
- using assessment in the classroom to let pupils know how well they are doing and set targets for further learning.

I very much hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in your school. A copy of this feedback will be sent to your local authority.

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

Tony Shield
Additional Inspector