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Miss C McCormack
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Dear Miss McCormack

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you very much for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 02 and 04 October 2007.

At the end of the inspection I fed back my judgements and this letter is to confirm my findings. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the extent to which every student is benefiting from your music provision. It also explored the links you have developed with other colleges and agencies, such as the local Music Service.

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 unless to highlight exceptional practice. In such circumstances the college would be contacted prior to publication to agree the exact wording. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with members of staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

All teaching seen during the two days was no less than satisfactory and there have been considerable improvements made to the resources and accommodation for music over the past year, partly through the imaginative use of specialist college status. However, the overall effectiveness of music is inadequate mainly because of the too narrow curriculum in Key Stage 3 and the lack of strategic development of the new BTEC course in Key Stage 4.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are inadequate overall.

- When students join the college in Year 7, their musical abilities and experiences are well below standards expected nationally. However, the standard of their work remains well below average throughout Key Stage 3. Results at GCSE have also been well below average, with students achieving lower grades in music than they did in their other subjects.
- Students made satisfactory progress within the lessons observed during the inspection. However, they do not have enough in-depth opportunities to experience an appropriately broad range of musical styles and cultures, and insufficient curriculum time is allocated in Key Stages 3 and 4. This all means that, over time, they make inadequate progress.
- Too few students take up opportunities for additional instrumental and vocal tuition, and too few students participate in ensemble music-making activities. There is considerable drop-out in these activities from Year 9 onwards.
- The change to BTEC music for the current Years 10 and 11 is benefiting the self-esteem of some boys who might otherwise be disengaged in school. However, younger students reported that they did not feel that music is a subject that benefits everyone in the college community.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons is satisfactory.

- Teaching was satisfactory in all music lessons seen during this inspection visit and, within each lesson, students made satisfactory progress in the aspects of music being studied.
- Satisfactory use is made of the excellent resources that are available to teachers and students, including ICT and acoustic classroom instruments. In Key Stage 3 lessons, there was an appropriate emphasis on practical music-making at the heart of the teaching and learning. However, in the new BTEC course some opportunities to link students' musical skills and interests with the other aspects of the course such as marketing and the music business were missed.
- Behaviour is generally satisfactory, and teachers are consistent in their approaches to behaviour management. However, teachers do not plan a wide enough range of tasks with more difficult challenges for more able students and activities broken down into smaller, more manageable chunks for students who do not find music as easy.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The overall quality of the curriculum and extra-curricular provision is inadequate.

- Throughout Key Stage 3, one hour of music is provided every fortnight. This arrangement does not allow students to enjoy an appropriate breadth and depth of musical experiences, nor does it allow them to make and maintain satisfactory progress in their music skills, knowledge, and understanding over time. The paucity of curriculum time in Key Stage 3 was also reported in the 1999 inspection report.
- The scheme of work for Key Stage 3 music does not give full and appropriate coverage to the requirements of the National Curriculum. There is a unit of work on Indian music, but this has not been taught for some years. Not enough world music styles are studied in the Key Stage 3 curriculum and this is especially surprising in a college with such a rich cultural diversity. There is very little Western art music, no jazz, and too few opportunities for developing singing in the curriculum.
- The BTEC music course was introduced in September 2007, in direct response to the needs and interests of students – particularly those students currently in Year 11 who were considered to be making insufficient progress on the GCSE course. The reasons for offering the course are appropriate, and are welcomed by students. However, lack of strategic planning and the short implementation timescale have the consequence that insufficient teaching time is provided, and no training has been provided for the staff teaching the course. There is not a sufficiently detailed overall course plan or long-term scheme of work for the department other than the published specification.
- There are some opportunities for students to improve their performance skills through additional tuition and ensemble activities, including keyboard and guitar clubs as well as a range of enrichment activities including an annual school production, work with the academy for gospel music, involvement in the world global event, black awareness week, carol services, senior citizens' parties, masses and liturgies. The small choir includes gospel-style singing, and there are tabla lessons available, providing some opportunities for students to develop their understanding and respect for musical diversity. However, there is considerable drop-out from all instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities as students move through the college, with almost no Key Stage 4 students participating.

Leadership and management of music

The overall quality of leadership and management is inadequate.

- The music department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The new accommodation and resources are well-ordered. However, the curriculum provision in music does not focus sufficiently on improving students' musical standards across a broad range of musical experiences.
- Ineffective monitoring and management of music on a whole-school level is seen in the inappropriate amount of time given to music at Key Stages 3

and 4, and the lack of strategic planning for the introduction of the new BTEC course.

- The subject leader does not have sufficient continuing professional development opportunities and there has been limited application of national initiatives in music.
- There are three teachers with musical experience and expertise who contribute to the curriculum; potentially, this is a strength for the college's future work in music.

Subject issues: Data collection and partnerships

- The college assesses students' work against the National Curriculum levels throughout Key Stage 3, and appropriate records are kept. However, the standards of work and assessment samples seen show that the higher levels given are over-generous. Too much emphasis is placed on the assessment of individual skills in composing, performing, and listening, rather than considering the students' progress across all areas of musical skills, knowledge, and understanding.
- Through the college's specialist status, there has been some involvement in additional artistic activities, particularly with the Arts Council's Creative Partnerships scheme and links with local professional musicians.
- Some opportunities are taken to include musical experiences in other areas of the curriculum, particularly in Media Studies.

Inclusion

- The college places great importance on matching the curriculum to students' interests. This rationale is behind the strong emphasis on popular music throughout the curriculum and the introduction of the BTEC course. However, this emphasis does not meet the needs and interests of all students in the college and does not ensure that they encounter the breadth of musical experiences and styles that they should, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- One commendable feature is that, with many students coming from homes where there is relative social and economic deprivation, no charge is made to the few who receive additional instrumental or vocal tuition. The cost of these lessons is borne by the college.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed and agreed, included:

- ensuring that adequate time is given to music throughout Key Stage 3, and that the scheme of work ensures that there is sufficient breadth and depth to enable good progress in students' skills, knowledge, and understanding
- ensuring that staff are properly trained and prepared to teach the BTEC music course, and that this course is properly planned, resourced, and given sufficient teaching time

- leading from improvements in curriculum provision, widen participation in extended instrumental learning and ensemble activities.

I very much hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in your college.

A copy of this feedback will be sent to your local authority, will be available to the next institutional inspection team, and will be published.

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 college. 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

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools