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Mr G Connolly  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Connolly

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 24-25 January 2008. 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 pupil is benefiting from your music provision. It also explored the links you have developed with other schools 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 school 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: discussions with members of staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. Good teaching, including some which is outstanding, enables pupils to be effective learners who make good progress.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3 and most meet national expectations by the end of Year 9. Pupils observed in a Year 7 class were making outstanding progress in performing in a Samba band. They played complex cross rhythms accurately and improvised call and response sequences which enhanced the performance.
- The proportion of pupils studying music in Key Stage 4 is well above the national average. Standards are high with results in GCSE examinations being well above average. Pupils achieve well in music compared with their results in other subjects. No lessons were observed in Key Stage 4, but recorded performances show that many pupils have well developed skills which they use sensitively to achieve stylistic and musical performances.
- In Key Stage 3 almost one in three of the pupils learns an instrument and is involved in extra-curricular activities. While this proportion reduces slightly in Key Stage 4, the numbers involved remain high.
- Pupils are motivated and their personal development in music is good. They are enthused and respond especially well when involved in practical music making whether in the classroom or in extra-curricular activities. Pupils said that they particularly enjoyed this aspect of their music lessons.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching is good and as a result, pupils make good progress. Relationships are good and pupils engage well with their learning.
- Teachers support pupils well. They use their subject expertise effectively to help pupils understand how to improve.
- The best teaching, which is outstanding, focuses strongly on developing musical responses through engaging pupils directly in high quality music making. As a result pupils achieve outstanding results when performing together.
- In less effective lessons, pupils are not always given sufficient opportunity to develop their musical skills, particularly their aural skills, through practical activities such as performing in ensembles.

## Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The overall quality of the curriculum and extra-curricular provision is satisfactory with good features.

- The curriculum includes a good variety of musical styles and activities which engages and motivates pupils.

- The department has rightly identified the need to re-draft the scheme of work for Key Stage 3 to respond to current national initiatives and to clarify the importance of focusing on aural and musical activities. This work has already started. The school is aware of the need to ensure that the scheme of work identifies the musical learning that will take place, clarifies progression and takes into account pupils' different musical abilities, interests and prior attainment.
- The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities and instrumental lessons. These are enhanced by additional opportunities beyond the school, including those organised in collaboration with the local authority.
- Music plays an important part in the liturgical life of the school. Music provides strong support for the Catholic ethos of the school. This collaboration helps to expand pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development.
- The school correctly recognises that current provision for information and communication technology (ICT) within the department is inadequate. As a result pupils have too few opportunities to use ICT in their music making. Action has been taken to improve the situation with the imminent establishment of a music technology studio.

#### Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- The school has undertaken a detailed and comprehensive self evaluation of music and has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. There are appropriate priorities for improvement.
- There is a clear understanding and vision of how the subject needs to be developed. The commitment to improving music provision is seen, for example, in the current increased staffing levels and in the recognition that the currently inadequate accommodation for music needs urgent improvement.
- The department is responding positively to current national changes in Key Stage 3 and is adapting its scheme of work in the light of these changes. The school has also identified the need to ensure that the best practice in teaching and learning is shared across the department.

#### Subject issue: Partnership Links

- The school has strong links with a number of partners including the local authority music coordinator. The school has been involved in a number of initiatives. These include the 'Musicians of the future' project in which the school is collaborating with the local authority and the Royal College of Music to provide support for pupils to learn musical instruments. Other collaborations include the opportunity for able pupils in Year 9 to develop their composing and ICT skills at a Skills Centre which is a joint venture with two adjacent local authorities.

## Inclusion

- The department aims to be an inclusive department where all pupils are valued. The classroom curriculum provides well for pupils' needs and interests although the school recognises that increased provision for ICT is needed to ensure all pupils can make the most of the musical opportunities. The classroom curriculum is very well supplemented by a good range of activities and opportunities beyond the classroom.
- Information about pupils' interests and achievements is gathered when they enter the school in Year 7. Information about pupils' attainment is then collected and recorded regularly as they progress through the school. The department recognises that this information is not always used systematically to help to match work to pupils' needs and interests.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- sharing the best practice in teaching and learning across the department, ensuring that pupils are given sufficient practical activities to develop their musical skills
- completing the re-drafting of the scheme of work for Key Stage 3 ensuring that it identifies the musical learning that will take place, clarifies progression and takes into account pupils' different musical abilities, interests and prior attainment.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

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

David Williams  
Additional Inspector