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Miss S Dignasse
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Dear Miss Dignasse

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 26 - 27 January 2009. 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 schools and agencies.

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, students and a teacher from a local secondary school, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is good with some outstanding features. The links developed with other schools, including a local secondary school, are excellent. The work of the music department in the community is also a significant strength. Music is supported well in the school and students are making increasing progress.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are good.

- Students' attainment is good, particularly in Key Stage 4 and in extra-curricular activities. Standards in the sixth form are increasing as students are now making more progress. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is secure and students achieve within the school's expectations. However, there are not enough opportunities for students to achieve at the highest levels.
- Involvement in extra-curricular activities is particularly good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- Students' attainment on entry to the school is being significantly enhanced through the excellent links with primary schools and the increasingly effective use of assessment data within and across all key stages.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good with outstanding features.

- There are good relationships between staff and students throughout the department and teachers have high levels of musical expertise.
- The listening based work in an A level lesson was of the very highest quality with students being helped to increase their aural skills through skilful use of music increasingly supported by visual symbols and eventually staff notation.
- Lessons are planned and managed well. Students are given extensive opportunities to work practically and to develop confidence in the use of musical vocabulary. However, progress in some lessons was limited because the students were not clear how they could improve their work and opportunities were missed to reinforce learning through performing together as a class.
- Students are given excellent support and encouragement in the extra-curricular activities, including the activity arranged for pupils from a primary school.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The quality of the curriculum and extra-curricular provision is good with some outstanding features.

- The curriculum is planned with integrity. Clear strands of development have been identified, such as the development of musical vocabulary, and followed through in the schemes of work for Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- Singing is included well in class work, in assemblies and large scale singing activities and in the extra-curriculum.

- A good breadth of extra-curricular experiences is provided by teachers from within and beyond the department. Students enjoy the opportunities to go on International tours and perform in local and national venues.
- The curriculum is under constant evaluation and revision and the school recognises the need to now ensure students are helped to explore music in more depth, for example, through more investigation into how and, most importantly why, musical devices, processes and conventions are used in different kinds of music.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good with some outstanding features.

- You have a clear vision for music as an important part of the school curriculum and provide good support. The development of a large team through extending their roles within and beyond the school has been particularly innovative and effective. This approach has enabled, among many positive outcomes, the involvement of the community in the music work of the school.
- The link within another local secondary school is outstanding as the carefully planned interventions have led to mutual support and development across both schools. This impact is also increasingly evident in the links established with primary schools.
- The subject self-evaluation is helpfully detailed and accurate. The school is fully aware of the areas that require further development and has shown excellent capacity for improvement.

Subject issue:

Inclusion

- The school does much to ensure all students are involved. All are encouraged to take GCSE and given good support. For example, those with less developed instrumental skills are fully integrated within the groups. The school is also giving good attention to the possibility of providing other courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- The school keeps good records of student attendance at extra-curricular activities and good plans are being considered for how to ensure all groups are represented equally.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the schemes of work and assessment criteria at Key Stage 3 to ensure students are enabled to explore music in depth and helped to achieve the highest levels

- looking again at the teaching approaches used at Key Stage 3 to make sure students always know what to do to improve their work and effective use is made of performing together as a whole class
- continue to encourage and enable all groups of students to benefit from the extra-curricular opportunities.

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

Anthony Knight
Her Majesty's Inspector