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10 February 2010

Mr J Hussey
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hussey

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 1 and 2 February 2010 to look at work in music.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the extent to which all students are benefiting from the provision. I also explored the partnerships you may have developed with other schools and agencies to improve continuity and increase opportunity for your students.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff; a meeting with the music service manager; talking with selected students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work, visits to 10 lessons, and observing an after-school samba workshop.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. Specialist status has brought substantial investment in new accommodation and equipment, which help to provide a broadly satisfactory curriculum. However, teaching and leadership of music are not good enough to take students' achievement beyond satisfactory. You recognise that this outcome is considerably short of what should be expected by the third year of specialist status.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Given their varied starting points, students make broadly satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3. However, standards remain below average because there is inconsistency in their musical development across the full range of musical experiences. They make better progress through playing instruments and exploring popular musical styles than they do through singing and composing work.
- The proportion of students taking the GCSE music or expressive arts courses in Key Stage 4 is average. The 2009 music results were in line with standards nationally and these students made satisfactory progress. A small group of more able students took GCSE music in Year 9, and all achieved a good pass grade.
- Overall, participation rates in additional instrumental tuition, and in the reasonable range of extra-curricular activities, are satisfactory.
- Sixth-form students taking the A-level music technology course make satisfactory progress given their prior attainment. However, standards remain below average, particularly in students' knowledge and understanding of musical structures and vocabulary.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Together, the music staff offer a good range of musical skills and experience. Music is modelled confidently, and working relationships in the classroom are usually positive.
- Lessons usually include practical activity, although this is often preceded by over-long verbal presentation by the teacher. An emphasis on participating and developing performance competencies helps students to make satisfactory progress. It is not better than this because there is insufficient emphasis on increasing the musical quality of their work, or the depth and breadth of their cultural understanding.
- Work is marked regularly, providing clear feedback to students. These assessments focus on increasing technical skill or theoretical knowledge, rather than their holistic musical development. Some recordings are made of students' work in Key Stage 3, but limited use is made of these to develop students' listening and appraising skills.
- The departmental teaching assistant and technician are well managed by teachers. They play an active and effective role in supporting learning, and provide students with very good role-models.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been developed to include a programme of whole-class brass teaching in Year 7, work based on the Musical Futures approach to learning in Year 8, and an Access to Music qualification course for all students in Year 9. These have had some

positive effects on students' achievement. For example, a brass band has been established, and students enjoy the focus on group working and popular music styles in the Musical Futures course. While activities are planned clearly, not enough consideration has been given to how these and other approaches fit together to provide a coherent musical experience across the full range of musical styles and cultures.

- Outline schemes of work and the awarding bodies' published materials are used to map coursework requirements in Key Stages 4 and 5. However, planning does not give sufficient consideration to how the school can promote higher standards of musical response and understanding.
- Accommodation for music now includes three class-teaching rooms, information and communication technology (ICT) suites, a recording studio and group practice rooms. There are good resources for class practical work. Much of the ICT equipment is new, and so opportunities to use ICT to support learning in Key Stage 3 are in the early stages of development.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- The department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Leadership of teaching, the curriculum and extra-curricular activities is sufficient to enable students' satisfactory progress. The improvements in accommodation and resources have been managed well. The head of department and other teachers have kept informed about current developments in music education. However, curriculum strategies have not been thought through sufficiently well for them to have better than satisfactory impact. Similarly, initiatives such as the Key Stage 3 strategy have not impacted sufficiently to improve teaching styles significantly.
- The subject self-evaluation correctly identifies key areas for further improvement but also presents an over-generous opinion about the quality of provision and outcomes. However, you have a very accurate view of the department, particularly in the limited progress made since school achieved its specialist status.

Subject issue: inclusion

- All groups of students are represented in musical activities. It is encouraging that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are represented well in examination courses, additional instrumental tuition, and extra-curricular activities. At the same time, however, noticeably fewer students from minority ethnic groups participate.

Subject issue: partnerships

- The school has built some good links with the local authority music service. The area manager has a base in the music department, which also hosts the area Rockschoo and Saturday Morning Music Centre. Some

performance events and teaching are provided for feeder schools, although this work has yet to extend to sharing professional development activities with primary colleagues. There are also links with local and national music organisations, such as Oxford Contemporary Music.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- undertaking a thorough review of the curriculum in all key stages so that it promotes good and outstanding achievement by:
 - underpinning and coordinating all teaching programmes with a clear vision for the musical progress that students should make, as well as the activities in which they will participate across the full range of musical styles and cultures
 - ensuring that best use is made of ICT, particularly in Key Stage 3, now that the new resources are in place
- improving the quality of teaching by:
 - placing emphasis on developing students' musical understanding, as well as their completion of activities in all lessons
 - reducing the time spent on verbal presentations and explanations, particularly at the start of lessons
 - focusing assessments on the quality of students' holistic musical responses, rather than on isolated technical competencies
 - making better use of recordings to help students understand and improve the quality of their work
- improving the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that the highest expectations for students' achievement, and the quality of all aspects of the department's work, are commensurate with the school's specialist status.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector