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1 February 2010

Mr S Cook
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Cook

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 19 and 20 January 2010 to look at work in music.

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 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 and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and visits to 10 lessons and rehearsals of the Grange Chorus and the Rock Orchestra.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

Students achieve well in examinations. Good teaching and excellent use of new technology encourage participation and enjoyment in class music lessons. However, while the department is led and managed well, a number of curriculum issues - including restrictive accommodation - prevent students' further participation and progress.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- Considering their prior musical experiences, students make good progress to reach securely average standards at the end of Key Stage 3. Apart from the current Year 10, this has led to an above-average proportion opting for a music course in Key Stage 4, where they too have made good progress to reach above-average standards in both the GCSE and BTEC courses.
- Sixth-form students attain average standards in their A-level examinations and develop good personal skills through their involvement in music. There have been some concerns about retention, particularly in the A Level Music Technology course, but a good proportion of students have continued with their studies following the 2009 AS-level examinations.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Working relationships in lessons and rehearsals are outstanding. Teachers are enthusiastic and have excellent musical skills. These qualities are reflected in students' good progress and great enjoyment in lessons.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is particularly noteworthy. ICT is used very effectively to engage students of all interests and abilities, and particularly to give access to those with little prior experience of creating music. Teachers make innovative use of the internet and other technologies, such as mobile telephones, to set, record, and assess students' work.
- Clear learning objectives are set and all lessons include practical music-making. However, there are occasions when teachers use the spoken word to explain musical ideas when it would be clearer for them to demonstrate, thus enabling students to hear the intended effect. Similarly, the full benefits of some otherwise worthwhile starter activities are lost because they are unrelated to the main musical activities that follow.
- It is very positive that singing activities are included throughout Key Stages 3 and 4. However, the benefits of these are not always maximised because of missed opportunities to raise the quality of singing by challenging students to improve, for example, their intonation or phrasing.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work are extremely thorough for all key stages, ensuring that there are good depth and breadth of curriculum content and thorough coverage of all coursework requirements.
- Provision of GCSE and BTEC courses in Key Stage 4 has provided a good range of opportunities for students with different interests and abilities, and has provided good preparation for the Music and Music Technology A-Level courses which are taught in partnership with other local schools. However, the whole-school decision that all students should take one of the new Diploma courses meant that there was insufficient interest for the GCSE course to run in the current Year 10. The BTEC course will also be withdrawn

after this year. While the school plans to offer GCSE Music again from September 2010 as a specialist learning option within the Creative and Media Diploma, this curriculum change has had a negative effect on current Year 10 students' progress and participation in music.

- Accommodation for music is inhibiting students' further progress. There is limited space for practice and instrumental teaching. Corridors and classrooms are cramped which, together with ICT installations and steeply tiered floors, are not conducive to whole-class and small-group practical activities. Sixth-form students are correct in commenting that there are inadequate facilities for them to engage in private practice or musical study outside of lesson time.
- There is a satisfactory range of additional instrumental tuition and extra-curricular ensemble, including the Grange Chorus, orchestra, Rock Orchestra, and jazz group.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- The head of music, who is also an advanced skills teacher (AST), has a clear vision for the department and self-evaluation correctly identifies areas for further improvement.
- Teachers are kept up-to-date with current issues in music education through regular training and partnerships with other schools.
- Teaching and learning are monitored and supported regularly, including by senior staff. However, while there has been good support through the provision of ICT equipment, there is much more to be done to ensure that the accommodation is matched well to curriculum requirements.
- Recent whole-school changes in the Key Stage 4 curriculum and the organisation of extra-curricular activities have affected participation rates significantly. While school leaders have already identified and accepted these issues, it is important that their alternative plans for September 2010 ensure that all students continue to participate and make good progress in their music-making.

Subject issue: inclusion

- A satisfactory number of students benefit from additional instrumental tuition and/or participate in extra-curricular musical activities. All groups are represented although, proportionally, fewer students with special educational needs and/or disabilities or those in receipt of free school meals are involved. Similarly, while both gender groups are represented, almost all members of the Grange Chorus are girls, while the Rock Orchestra is predominantly boys.

Subject issue: partnerships

- Through the AST programme, the school provides support to other secondary schools in the local authority and also supports performance events in

primary schools. There are no curriculum links with primary schools, and this is an area for future development.

- There are some partnerships with local professional and amateur music groups, such as the Great Western Chorus. The school recognises that more could be made of these partnerships to improve access and participation, for example in increasing the number of boys in singing work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the curriculum so that it is good in all respects by:
 - adapting the department's accommodation to provide better facilities for instrumental teaching, small-group music-making, and independent study for sixth-form students
 - ensuring that students in Key Stage 4 are able to continue making good progress and prepare well for their future studies
 - further increasing participation rates in additional activities by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those in receipt of free school meals
- moving teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - ensuring that there is a central focus on developing students' musical aural awareness in all lessons
 - making clear musical links between different activities to reinforce students' musical understanding
 - always challenging students to improve the quality of their singing.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in the 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 the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector