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1 March 2012

Mr A Corish
Headteacher
Bishop Challoner Catholic Secondary School
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Dear Mr Corish

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 16 and 17 January 2012 to look at work in music.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with students and staff, including a visiting music teacher; a meeting with the Hampshire County Music Inspector; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of six lessons, one jointly with a deputy headteacher, and rehearsals of the choir and a woodwind ensemble.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- Students make good progress and attain highly throughout the school. In Key Stage 3, they become confident musicians who perform and improvise at a high standard, listen with good understanding and draw on their clear understanding of musical concepts and a wide range of musical styles. Music is a popular subject with many more students than average, from all groups, taking the GCSE course. They consistently reach above-average grades and a high proportion go on to study A-level music in local colleges.
- The school choir is well attended; singing in this, and in the regular musical productions, is of a very high technical standard. A similar standard is found in the instrumental groups. These students perform to

wide acclaim in many high-profile local events. However, singing is underused in lessons as a learning tool, and students' singing in class is unconfident with technical weaknesses (inaccurate pitching, for example). Little 'singing for all' takes place across the school.

- A high proportion of students take part in instrumental lessons, progressing very well. Girls very considerably outnumber boys overall in such lessons and in the choir. Boys, nevertheless, predominate in brass and guitar lessons. The school offers free instrumental lessons to students entitled to free school meals but the take up is relatively low from this group.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is outstanding.

- Lessons in both key stages are calm, excellently paced and enjoyable, with a constant diet of very well-structured practical musical activity for all. The teacher sings and plays instruments frequently for students, demanding a highly musical response from them. Explanations of complex and challenging musical ideas are very precise, concise, clear and well informed, showing her high expectations and very wide subject knowledge. Questioning of students is excellent, eliciting often deep, thoughtful answers and keeping their learning firmly on track.
- Staff know and discuss individual needs with the students exceptionally well. This applies equally, from supporting a student choosing which instruments to use in a GCSE composition, to advising a Year 7 student to play a keyboard with two fingers not one, at just the right moment. In instrumental lessons observed, the teacher modelled and demonstrated techniques very well so that students could learn quickly and confidently. Assessments are very accurate. During class lessons, the teacher makes constant well-chosen references to past and future learning. This ensures students link all their musical learning very effectively. Recordings of students' compositions and performances are used very well to support the students in evaluating and improving their work.
- Instrumental teaching observed, and that for the choir, was excellent.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- Detailed, well-considered and constantly refined schemes of work for all year groups ensure that students enjoy a broad, varied, exciting and coherent range of musical learning as they move through the school. Musical ideas and concepts are clearly developed in a progressive way. Theory is very carefully and effectively linked to the wide range of practical activity. Sufficient time is given to the subject; the twice-weekly lessons in Year 9 enable students to revisit and build their learning quickly and effectively. Visits out of school further enhance students' musical experience, including for some not taking the subject at GCSE.

- Singing is, however, underdeveloped in the curriculum. The use of keyboards to support learning is well planned, and students play them to good effect, but the frequency of their use in lessons tends to crowd out the use of acoustic instruments, such as pitched percussion.
- Resourcing and accommodation for music are adequate, but no better. Their limitations are effectively worked around by astute timetabling and management. You are aware of the need to improve the facilities as the school grows in size and are considering suitable options to do so.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is good.

- You and your senior team share a clear understanding of the importance of music to the young people; it is clearly valued and encouraged.
- The experienced head of department sustains an up-to-date knowledge of issues in music education, largely through working with the Hampshire Music Service. She evaluates the subject very accurately and a well-constructed action plan ensures constant improvement.
- Her responsibilities as assistant headteacher add further to the status of music. They also limit somewhat the time she has for the subject. She led at one time a boys' choir but has had to stop this. Through her whole-school responsibility for transition from Year 6, she knows much about students' prowess in instrumental learning from their primary schools but has yet to develop close partnerships with the main feeder schools about the broader curriculum and assessment in music.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the importance and place of singing
 - by students in lessons as method of enhancing their learning and communicating their musical thinking
 - for students across the whole school, including those not taking music courses or who are in the choir or musical productions
- encouraging more boys to join the school choir, and more boys and those entitled to free school meals to take up instrumental lessons, by analysing any barriers to their participation and planning actively to overcome these
- developing closer musical links with the main feeder primary schools
- making more use of acoustic instruments in lessons.

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

As explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector