

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Mr A Park  
Headteacher  
Chorlton High School  
Nell Lane  
Chorlton-Cum-Hardy  
Manchester  
M21 7SL

Dear Mr Park

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 21 and 22 April 2010 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and selected students; a meeting with a peripatetic music teacher; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; visits to five lessons; and observing extra-curricular activities. A telephone conversation was also held with the headteacher of a feeder primary school.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. Partnerships with other schools and music organisations are excellent. The work of the music department in the local community is a significant strength. Music is led exceptionally well, and students are making increasingly improved progress.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- The proportion of students taking the GCSE music course in Key Stage 4 is broadly average. Music results improved significantly in 2009 and the proportion of students attaining A\* and A grades is well above that seen nationally. Students made good progress in all parts of the examination course. Work scrutiny, school data and observations in lessons confirm that standards for the current Year 11 are also above average. In addition, some students took the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE)

level 2 Certificate in music technology in 2009 and all attained a pass grade.

- In 2009, students in Year 9 took the BTEC First Certificate in performing arts, specialising in either music or music technology. Although the students studying the music units passed and 89% of the students attained a pass in the music technology units, the work seen in lessons indicates that overall musical standards at the end of Year 9 are no higher than those expected nationally. However, given students' mixed attainment on entry, they make good progress. Students benefit significantly from gaining a music qualification in Year 9 and this is helping to engage more of them in music courses in Key Stage 4.
- The school recognises that singing is not as well developed as other aspects of music learning and, consequently, this has an impact on students' overall achievement.
- Participation of both boys and girls in the reasonable range of ensembles that takes place after school is broadly satisfactory. However, many more boys than girls choose to study examination courses. This is mainly due to the number of boys studying music technology courses. Students develop their social skills very well when they take part in the extensive range of music projects and workshops with professional musicians. For example, taking part in an operatic workshop, was described by students as 'an amazing experience' and it introduced them to a previously unfamiliar style of music. However, the school agrees that developing more opportunities for students to make music together on a regular basis is important for their musical development.

#### Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- There are strong working relationships between staff and students. Staff work well together in sharing their individual musical skills and expertise. Lessons are planned thoroughly and students are given regular opportunities to work practically, assess each other's work and to develop confidence in the use of musical vocabulary.
- Most lessons proceed at a good pace and offer appropriate challenge, enabling students to be engaged in their learning. Questioning is used regularly to test students' understanding of the tasks set, and materials and resources are chosen carefully. Occasionally, some tasks lack a clear musical focus and continue for too long before progress and understanding are checked.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used regularly to support learning and students benefit very well from using the recording studio and other electronic equipment. However, at present, audio recordings are insufficiently used during lessons to help students and their teachers to monitor progress and identify areas to improve.

## Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- The curriculum is directly relevant to students' needs and interests. Planning is thorough and gives clear consideration to promoting high standards and musical understanding. However, singing is not a regular aspect of the curriculum and the school is urgently looking at ways to include this more frequently.
- Regular evaluation and revision of the curriculum ensure that changes are made and additional courses are available for students in Key Stages 3 and 4. These are welcomed, especially by those students who are considering different aspects of the music industry as a career choice or for further music study.
- Resources and accommodation are exceptionally good. Classrooms are very well equipped. The recording studio is an additional important resource which enables students to make professional recordings of their compositions and performances.
- In addition to regular ensembles, there is a comprehensive programme of curriculum enrichment activities, including stand-alone projects or others that continue over a longer time. Many are used to introduce students to, and involve them in, different styles of music. For example, the jazz and improvisation workshops inspired students to use this style of music in their compositions.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- Senior leaders have embarked on a long-term strategy to improve provision in music and the outcomes for students. Much has been achieved in a short period of time; mostly this is the result of the excellent leadership shown by the Assistant Director of Arts College. She is strongly supported by senior leaders together with the teaching and technical support staff. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation are in place, for example through lesson observations and learning walks, to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is more consistent. Staff new to teaching are given very good individual support so that they can successfully develop their teaching skills and lead particular aspects of music provision.
- Students' progress is monitored thoroughly so that appropriate levels of challenge and support can be provided. Consequently, results improved in 2009 and early indications show that this is set to continue in 2010.
- Very effective use is made of specialist status funding and other monies to develop music provision, support some students and improve resources, especially for new courses. This is enabling more students to continue their involvement during their time at school, especially through the annual Chorlton Arts Festival. This provides exceptional opportunities for students to perform through a wide range of media.

- The school has developed outstanding links with primary schools, music organisations and other agencies. Effective activities are provided for and welcomed by, primary colleagues.
- Firm foundations for improvement have been laid. Nevertheless, the department is not complacent and realises that more needs to be done. Planning is thoughtful, reflective and evaluative indicating very good capacity to improve further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- finding ways to increase singing and the use of audio recordings more regularly in music lessons
- increasing students' participation in a greater variety of ensembles that rehearse regularly during the term.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Marianne Young  
Her Majesty's Inspector