

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Dr EV Inch OBE
Headteacher
King Edward VI Handsworth School
Rose Hill Road
Handsworth
Birmingham
B21 9AR

Dear Dr Inch

Ofsted 2012–13 good practice survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 7 July 2012 to look at work in music and particularly the impact of your partnership work with Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (BCMG).

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting, including the forthcoming report on music education partnerships (commissioned as part of the National Plan for Music Education). 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 staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; a discussion with music professionals from BCMG and Birmingham City University (BCU); and observation of two class music lessons and a group instrumental lesson.

Features of good practice

- The school has been involved in partnership working with BCMG since 2005. A series of composition projects has involved BCMG performers, renowned composers, A level and GCSE students, and school teachers working together. Further partnership has involved academics from BCU in supporting and evaluating the projects.
- Fundamental to the success of the partnership has been the meticulous manner in which the projects have been planned and evaluated by all parties. In the latest project, *Listen, Compose, Perform*, one third of the project time was devoted to the learning needs and professional development of the participating adults. Consequently, this partnership has played a significant part in improving the musical and educational understanding of professional musicians, teachers and academics. As a

direct consequence of the *Electro-Sequenza* project, your head of music has developed a unit of work that is taught solely by school staff as part of the GCSE music course.

- Teaching composition through the study and performance of contemporary music styles has brought huge benefits to the breadth and depth of students' musical understanding. With nearly one in every four girls taking GCSE music, standards in composing have improved over the past six years. The average mark for the composing paper has risen from 80% when the partnership started to 93% in 2011. The quality of students' preparatory work, as well as their final compositions, is excellent. At A level, students' understanding of contemporary music styles has extended through participation in regular young composers' workshops out of school.
- It is important to note that these projects have not stood alone, divorced from other aspects of the school's work in music. Teaching and learning seen during the visit, such as in the dhol drumming group, reveal a highly musical approach with excellent modelling, emphasis on aural development, and attention to detail. In the Year 10 GCSE lesson, a series of short practical activities helped students to deconstruct and memorise the complexities of a Schoenberg tone-row so well that when they returned to their desks to complete written tasks, they had thoroughly internalised the music and were able to recall it in excellent detail.
- While partnerships with BCMG and other organisations have brought many benefits, the success of music at King Edward VI Handsworth School is underpinned by a well-organised and generous curriculum entitlement for all students. The Key Stage 3 scheme of work covers a good range of styles, traditions and genres, and individual units show clearly the range of skills and knowledge that teachers are expected to cover. There is, however, less consideration given to the standards and progress expected by the end of Year 9, particularly given girls' high attainment overall when they join in Year 7. At present, too much emphasis is on national expectations for students across all schools.

Areas for further development, which we discussed, include:

- making clearer the high standards and progress expected of students by the end of Year 9
- continuing to share the school's good practice in music with other schools locally, and making partnerships with other good practice schools nationally.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely
Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector