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Mr M Jones
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mr Jones

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit with David Townsend HMI on 4 and 5 November 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: scrutiny of relevant documentation and of pupils' work; visits to the singing practices in Key Stages 1 and 2; visits to six class music lessons, including one joint observation with the deputy headteacher; meetings with a panel of Year 6 pupils, senior staff, the music coordinator and the head of the Thurrock Music Service; and observation of a Year 4 'Wider Opportunities' lesson.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. Teachers have secure lesson management skills, and a significant number are confident singers. Because of this and through involvement in the national vocal strategy, for which the school has gained a 'Sing Up!' award, pupils make satisfactory progress in singing. However, these positive features do not compensate for poorly planned curriculum provision, which does not set high enough standards for, or map sufficiently the progression of, pupils' musical understanding across a full range of activities. Although the school takes part in the local authority's 'Wider Opportunities' scheme and makes a significant contribution towards the cost of these lessons, you have rightly recognised concerns about this programme. The honest and accurate self-evaluation and the senior team's determination to tackle these issues, as shown in the improvements made in singing, give confidence in the school's capacity to make the necessary improvements.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Standards in singing are broadly average. Most pupils sing with enjoyment and enthusiasm; most sing with clear diction and good intonation. Although there is some two-part singing, the majority is in unison.
- In all other respects, however, standards are low. Pupils make inadequate progress in developing melodic and rhythmic skills through instrumental work. Most classroom instrumental work involves untuned percussion; there is little work on pitched instruments. Pupils have poor cultural awareness and poor understanding of musical concepts.
- Participation in additional instrumental and vocal lessons is low. There is a choir which is much enjoyed by those who take part and which helps the school to build good links with other community groups, such as the local retirement home. However, boys are significantly underrepresented in the choir, and there are no extra-curricular music ensembles for those students who play instruments. No pupils have continued with additional instrumental tuition as a result of the initial 'Wider Opportunities' programme.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- A significant number of teachers have confident, tuneful singing voices; these are used well to model and explain, and are significant in helping pupils to make satisfactory progress in their vocal work. However, too often an equal amount of spoken explanation is used which distracts from active music-making, and this is a key reason why progress in singing is no better than satisfactory.
- All lessons involve some practical activity and students enjoy participating in them. Behaviour in music lessons is never less than satisfactory and is often good; working relationships are also usually good. Although all lessons are planned with clear objectives, the weak curriculum planning in music across the school means that they focus on the activities to be completed rather than the musical understanding to be achieved. Furthermore, the curriculum plans do not show sufficiently the standards of musical understanding expected nor plan for a sufficient range of activities. As a result, despite generally making satisfactory progress in completing the tasks set for individual lessons, pupils do not achieve high enough standards over time.
- Teachers have recently started to make recordings of pupils' work which are used to give instant feedback in lessons and add to their enjoyment. However, these recordings are not yet kept systematically or linked to formal assessments of pupils' progress.
- The 'Wider Opportunities' work is informed by teachers' excellent musical skills. It is very helpful that class teachers participate in these lessons, helping to improve their own musical understanding. However, not enough consideration is given to how the class teachers' generic pedagogical expertise can be used

in partnership with the visiting teachers' musical knowledge, particularly to assess and improve their pupils' progress.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- An outline curriculum plan is in place that uses a published scheme to allocate topics for each term in all year groups. However, there is no further detailed planning to show the school's expectations of the musical standards at different stages, or adaptation of these resources to meet the needs and abilities of pupils.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work in lessons and through work sampling reveals that, in practice, this poor curriculum planning leads to inappropriate tasks being set. For example, although Year 6 students successfully completed the 'Stifford School of Rock' project, this involved mostly non-musical activities with very little performing, composing or listening work. Information and communication technology is not used to create or explore music.
- The 'Wider Opportunities' programme in Year 4 is planned poorly. It consists of a series of fixed, pre-scripted activity plans that do not take into account the school's particular circumstances or the needs and progress of the pupils. Pupils are expected to start the programme without any prior experience of music, which is clearly not the case.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- The leadership and management of music are satisfactory because, although there are concerns about the leadership and management of the music curriculum, senior leaders have a very clear understanding of the reasons why pupils' achievement in music is inadequate. Action has been taken to improve the quality of singing through involvement in the national singing strategy, and you have been proactive in calling in the local authority music service to discuss your concerns with the 'Wider Opportunities' programme. The deputy headteacher gives a particularly strong lead to singing work, and the joint observation showed a good understanding of teaching and learning. All this gives confidence in the school's capacity to improve pupils' achievement in music although you recognise that this will require significant improvements in curriculum planning and provision.
- Staff have benefited from attending some professional development opportunities linked to the national vocal strategy; however, there has been no involvement in the national Key Stage 2 training programme provided through the local authority.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the music curriculum is planned in sufficient detail throughout the school to promote high musical standards and particularly to set high expectations for the development of pupils' melodic and rhythmic skills

- in partnership with the local authority music service, ensuring that the 'Wider Opportunities' programme is appropriately planned, and that the expertise of visiting music tutors and class teachers is used effectively in partnership to support pupils' progress
- providing intensive support for the improved planning and teaching of curriculum music, including through appropriate professional development programmes
- significantly increasing the proportion of pupils participating in additional instrumental and vocal lessons, and in extra-curricular activities, including through continuation rates after the initial 'Wider Opportunities' programme.

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. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector