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Mrs S Upson
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Upson

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 on 27 January 2011 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 you, the music coordinator and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; observation of three class lessons and a music therapy session.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory, with good features.

- Although standards of musical attainment are exceptionally low throughout the school, pupils make satisfactory progress in their musical development given the context of their individual and particular needs. Music lessons are used effectively to develop pupils' personal, social and verbal communication skills and their general enjoyment of school.
- Those who are chosen to participate in musical concerts and events out of school gain much confidence from these experiences. However, the most able pupils do not benefit from regular, additional individual tuition to develop further their musical skills and understanding.
- Early indications are that the pilot music therapy programme is making a good contribution to the selected pupils' social and communication skills.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory, with good features.

- Music lessons are characterised by good classroom organisation and very good working relationships between teachers, teaching assistants, and pupils. In the Early Years Foundation Stage lesson observed, there was a good emphasis on active music making and musical participation. However, in other lessons – particularly those for older pupils – while there are opportunities for practical work or active listening, too often there is an equal emphasis on spoken explanations or written communication. This includes the inappropriate or premature use of notation and written materials. This is an important reason why pupils do not make better than satisfactory progress in their musical development.
- Some computer programmes are used with the interactive whiteboards to help pupils respond to music. However, there is limited use of information and communication technology to help older pupils and those with mobility difficulties create and explore music, for example through soundbeam technology or through sequencing sounds.
- Some audio and video recordings are made, particularly of special projects led by visiting musicians, but not enough use is made of recordings in everyday music lessons to help pupils listen to and enjoy their work.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- The music curriculum for the junior and senior schools is based on a four-year rolling programme that combines commercially produced units of work with projects led by external providers. This arrangement ensures that all pupils receive weekly music lessons. Appropriate breadth and depth of musical styles are covered in the junior school, although the repertoire for older pupils is not as well matched to their ages. While all separate units are planned with clearly defined activities and learning objectives, planning is not clear enough to show expectations for individual pupils' musical development as they progress through the units.
- The introduction of the pilot music therapy programme has added a very positive dimension to the music curriculum, although at present it is only available to a limited number of pupils.
- The school participates in the local authority's 'Wider Opportunities' programme, provided through the Standards Fund. This involves an Advanced Skills Teacher visiting the school at the start of every half term to teach three classes, provide professional development for staff and to plan the weekly music lessons to be taught by the class teacher during the rest of the term. However, this arrangement does not lead to pupils enjoying better than satisfactory learning in playing instruments, as the programme replaces rather than enhances regular curriculum provision.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is good.

- Leadership and management are judged good in recognition of the concerted efforts of the music coordinator and senior staff in seeking, establishing, and managing well an improved range of musical activities. This includes workshops with professional groups such as the City of London Sinfonia and, most significantly, the introduction of the music therapy programme which the school has funded itself. The profile of music has been raised through the 'Sing Up!' silver award, given in recognition of the school's commitment to vocal work.
- Self-evaluation rightly recognises the good efforts to improve provision in establishing partnerships, and in the many generic strengths of classroom management, but is less accurate in understanding the musical effectiveness of teaching or the importance of ensuring musical progression throughout the curriculum.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- strengthening the curriculum by:
 - showing clearly in curriculum planning the musical progress that pupils are expected to make as they move through the school
 - considering how the partnership with the local authority could be better used to enhance pupils' musical development, including through extended instrumental work for those who show particular ability and interest
 - securing the music therapy programme after the initial pilot stage, and enabling an increasing number of pupils to benefit from this provision
- securing good musical teaching by:
 - ensuring that pupils are given every possible opportunity to engage with and communicate through music with less emphasis on verbal explanation and notation
 - exploring how technologies, including sound recordings and computer programmes, can be used creatively to extend musical participation, achievement and enjoyment.

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