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Ms D Feasey
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Dear Ms Feasey

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 2 February 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 staff and learners; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- On entry to the school, standards in music are exceptionally low, reflecting the nature of pupils' severe special educational needs and/or disabilities. During their time in school they make good progress, although standards remain below those seen nationally.
- Almost all pupils listen carefully to live and recorded music and achieve well when singing, playing instruments and creating music. Many sing with a good sense of the shape of the melody and use electronic and acoustic instruments imaginatively to explore different sounds and musical effects. Most are developing a good sense of pulse and rhythm, which they show when they move in time to music and when improvising simple rhythmic patterns to accompany their singing.

- Pupils' personal development through music is good. They enjoy their music making and make good progress in developing their social and communication skills and self-confidence.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Teaching ensures that pupils are actively engaged in music making, so that they learn through first-hand experience. Key features include the very positive ethos and working relationships between pupils, teachers and other adults. In the outstanding music provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, teaching strategies are constantly modified to respond to the changing needs of these pupils. The emphasis on enabling them to listen to and take part in appropriate musical activities very effectively develops their listening skills and responses to music.
- The strong subject knowledge seen in lessons is used very effectively, for example, to select appropriate repertoire and resources, and to provide good role models and guitar accompaniments for singing.
- Lessons have a good balance between ongoing activities, such as a welcoming song at the beginning of lessons, and other activities that are well planned to meet pupils' needs. In practice, lessons have a clear focus on the skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils are intended to acquire, but these are not explicit in lesson plans. As a result, other adults who support pupils' learning are not always clear about what pupils are intended to learn, as opposed to do, in lessons.
- Good systems for assessing and recording pupils' progress are used well to support the planning of subsequent lessons. Information gained through ongoing assessment is used to respond to pupils' work, but on a few occasions, this information was not fully used to further develop pupils' skills or understanding. The school has a good range of recordings of pupils' work, although it has identified that more use of recordings could be made to help pupils listen to and enjoy their work.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- The school provides a good range of opportunities for all pupils which engages and involves them very effectively. There is good emphasis on the use of the voice, both through singing and vocal improvisations and regular opportunities for pupils to listen to and respond to live and recorded music. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to support pupils' learning. Specialist resources including Soundbeam are used effectively with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, and a good range of other ICT resources is used well to support learning for other pupils.

- The school has regular partnerships with professional musicians and other organisations, including Sing-Up! The existing partnership with the local authority music service is being further developed to provide additional support for singing although the school is not yet involved in the Key Stage 2 Wider Opportunities programme. Collaborations with other schools include curriculum developments in the use of Soundbeam and shared involvement in projects such as a drumming club using djembe and other drums to extend existing classroom work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- The school's clear vision for music is based on the thorough evaluation of its strengths and areas for development. The organisation and leadership of the curriculum for music ensure that music is regularly accessible to all pupils. Music is also used well as an important part of the school's strategy to develop pupils' communication skills both in music and wider society.
- The arrangement for music lessons to be taught by a specialist teacher has a positive impact on pupils' musical progress and on their overall development. This expertise is also used effectively to develop the musical skills and understanding of other adults, through for example a guitar club. The school has good capacity for improvement in music.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- building on the subject leader's clear understanding by sharing more explicitly with other adults what pupils are intended to learn, as well as do, in lessons
- discussing with the local authority music service the ways in which pupils in Key Stage 2 could be offered relevant experiences as part of the 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

David Williams
Additional Inspector