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30 March 2011

Mr T Harman
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mr Harman

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 15 March 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, the Chair of Governors and the music governor; discussions with Year 6 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of two class lessons, an assembly and a drum lesson.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- A good proportion of pupils receives individual instrumental lessons, which are funded entirely by parents. Some make good progress in these lessons to achieve above average standards in instrumental performance examinations. Four boys are members of the local brass band; however, no other pupils have the opportunity to apply their skills in regular instrumental ensemble performances. Similarly, while most pupils sing willingly in class and in assemblies, they do not have opportunities to extend their vocal experiences through choral singing, and part-singing is limited. The overall quality of singing is only broadly in line with national expectations.

- The standard of pupils' creative work is low. They have few opportunities to invent their own music in curriculum lessons and, when composing work does happen, it does not build on their instrumental performance skills and is dominated by teacher instruction. Similarly, listening work is superficial and, while pupils are fed factual information about music, their aural skills are not developed. Given pupils' good dispositions to learning, their levels of interest and imagination, and their general standards of educational attainment, this represents inadequate progress.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Class music lessons are taught by a part-time visiting teacher. These are usually supported by a teaching assistant; the lessons observed were also supported by class teachers, although this is not normally the case. The musical skills offered by the visiting teacher, in particular providing piano accompaniments, are appreciated greatly and support pupils' singing very well.
- While lessons usually include some singing, they do not always feature other practical music-making activities. Planning shows that there is too often a focus on writing or drawing, rather than actively engaging with music.
- In common with other curriculum subjects, there is a useful overview of the skills and understanding that pupils are expected to develop as they progress through the school. In practice, however, there are insufficient differences in teachers' expectations of what pupils in different year groups and different key stages should achieve in lessons.
- The school recognises that formal assessment strategies in music are inadequate. Recordings are not used to capture and assess pupils' practical work. As importantly, informal assessment in lessons does not challenge pupils sufficiently – for example, by praising pupils for their observations about music they have listened to, even when those observations are incorrect.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- Curriculum planning is weak. For each key stage, there is a headline list of the topics for each weekly class lesson. However, these and individual lesson plans do not recognise the wide ranges of ages, abilities and prior music experiences within each class. Older pupils are right to observe that the stylistic range of songs, in class and in assemblies, is too narrow.
- The school facilitates a satisfactory range of additional instrumental lessons. However, other partnerships are weak. The school decided to withdraw from the local authority Music Service provision in September 2010, and consequently the instrumental teachers are engaged

independently. The school participated in the 'Wider Opportunities' programme in a previous academic year, but no longer does so. There are no significant music partnerships with the feeder secondary school, a specialist performing arts college.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- You and the new Chair of Governors have assumed your posts in challenging circumstances. Within this context, you have understandably had many priorities. Music has been afforded some attention, with the appointment of the part-time curriculum teacher and reorganisation of instrumental learning. However, you recognise that there has not been sufficient focus on the quality of music teaching and the music curriculum, or on providing broader opportunities for pupils' music-making. You recognise that, given the small number of pupils on roll, partnerships with other providers to widen the range of musical experiences on offer to pupils, and to provide subject-specific training for teachers, are insufficient.
- Despite these concerns, the musical skills and expertise of the part-time curriculum teacher, the good support offered to music by parents, the sharp and perceptive understanding shown by the music governor, and your clarity of purpose all give confidence in the capacity of the school to bring about the necessary improvements.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the quality of pupils' learning in curriculum lessons by:
 - ensuring that pupils of all ages and abilities are sufficiently challenged in lessons, particularly those with more advanced instrumental skills and experience
 - giving a much greater emphasis to participation in active music-making, rather than relying on writing and drawing activities
 - challenging pupils' responses more robustly, particularly in singing and listening work, by consistently correcting inaccuracies and misconceptions and always expecting the highest standards
- providing a suitably challenging music curriculum by:
 - ensuring that curriculum plans are particular to the needs of all pupils, recognising the full range of ages and abilities within each class
 - exploring and building partnerships with other providers to broaden the range of musical experiences offered to pupils

- developing the vocal repertoire to include a wide range of musical styles and regular opportunities for two-part singing, to challenge and enthuse older pupils.

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