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Miss A Connearn
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Connearn

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 4 and 5 May 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 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; and observation of six lessons and the Year 4 African drumming group.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Standards in music are low throughout the school. A significant number of children arrive at school with little or no knowledge of English; levels of mobility are exceptionally high. These are sizeable challenges for teachers, but are not the reasons for pupils' inadequate progress in music. The considerable gaps in curriculum provision result, in particular, in weak development of melodic understanding and limited development of instrumental skills. The African drumming club, which has been instigated by the Year 4 teacher, helps these pupils to make better progress in developing their rhythmic and ensemble skills. However, there are no other extra-curricular groups and no pupils receive additional instrumental or vocal tuition. Very little composition work takes place and pupils have severely limited understanding of musical styles and structures.

- It is disappointing that music plays such a limited role in boosting pupils' wider development, given the contexts in which the school is working.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is broadly satisfactory.

- Lessons led by class teachers are generally planned thoroughly with well-prepared written resources. Teaching assistants are managed well to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In the best cases, teachers model rhythmic and vocal work confidently and show a sound understanding of how children learn musically. For example, in one lesson, stave notation was integrated successfully in the course of a practical rhythm activity. However, not all class teachers have such secure subject understanding and this, together with curriculum deficiencies, means that their good generic teaching skills are not always put to best use. For example, in another lesson, while pupils were engaged by the organisation of a listening activity, their musical development was limited by the teacher's misunderstanding about graphic notation, together with the severe lack of curriculum guidance and instrumental resources.
- Teaching provided by the local authority Music Support Service is also characterised by confident modelling, but places much more emphasis on the teachers' performance than on the quality of pupils' responses.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- No overarching curriculum plan is in place for music across the school. This means that there is no clearly defined guidance for the activities that teachers are expected to lead, or for the musical skills, knowledge and understanding that pupils are expected to develop.
- The school funds, from its own budget, a partnership with the local authority Music Support Service to provide curriculum teaching for some classes. However, this work is not planned as part of an integrated whole-school strategy for music. It is positive that some parents have been encouraged to share their musical experience with pupils, for example in performing and teaching folk songs from the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, the school has not considered how it can build on the rich heritage and home musical experiences of pupils to build a music curriculum that meets their needs, interest and abilities.
- There is no programme of additional small group or individual music tuition. Pupils have not benefited from participation in funded initiatives, such as the Wider Opportunities instrumental teaching programme or events organised through the national singing strategy.
- Resources for classroom music are extremely limited. There are very few tuned percussion instruments and no keyboards, and this further inhibits the development of pupils' melodic understanding.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is inadequate.

- Senior leaders' honest and accurate self-evaluation recognises that insufficient attention has been given to organising and developing the music curriculum. While senior staff have challenged the local authority Music Support Service about the quality of provision resulting in a change of teacher, liaison concerning the management of these partnership arrangements remains inadequate. The school has not accessed other aspects of Music Service provision such as whole-class, small group and individual instrumental teaching.
- A useful audit has been carried out of staff skills and confidence in teaching music. However, professional development has been insufficient to help improve practice and to keep staff up to date with current developments, for example through the national Key Stage 2 Music continuing professional development programme or through the 'Sing Up!' training.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that, for September 2011, an overarching scheme of work is in place across the school to be used by all teachers and which takes full account of pupils' needs, interests, abilities, and cultural heritage
- ensuring, in particular, that the curriculum provides well-resourced opportunities for pupils to develop their instrumental skills and melodic understanding and to apply these skills in composing work
- exploring, in partnership with the local authority Music Support Service, how the school can access the funded opportunities to widen pupils' experiences in instrumental learning and singing
- refreshing the leadership and management of music, including the provision of continuing professional development for teachers, and building on stronger music teaching practice in the school.

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