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Mrs M Tellyn
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Dear Mrs Tellyn

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 29 June 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, pupils, and the head of the city music service; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of five class music lessons, including two whole-class instrumental lessons; visits to Key Stages 1 and 2 singing assemblies, and rehearsals for end-of-term productions.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. Leadership of vocal work is confident but whole-class instrumental teaching and learning is poorly planned, with unnecessary repetition and lack of coordination that restricts pupils' musical development in Key Stage 2. There are no extended instrumental ensemble opportunities and there is no provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in music, which further limits pupils' progress. Self-evaluation recognises all this and you have already taken action to appoint an experienced teacher as music coordinator from next term. For these reasons, and because of pupils' good attitudes and abilities, there is complete confidence in the school's capacity for making rapid improvements.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Pupils' willingness to learn and musical aptitude are evident from the earliest stages. In Key Stage 1, they sing with enthusiasm and with good

diction and intonation. Vocal work remains confident in Key Stage 2, with older students able to sing securely in two parts.

- All pupils have opportunities to learn the violin in Year 2, the recorder in Year 3, and the chalumeau in Year 4. While it is positive that these opportunities are provided, pupils do not make enough progress over and beyond this time. Much of what is covered in Year 3 is started again, unnecessarily, in Year 4. By the end of Year 4, pupils are working with the same limited number of pitch and rhythm values that they learnt over a year earlier, with no improvement in phrasing and expression. A small minority choose to continue learning beyond Year 4; some of these have progressed to taking an external music examination but, given the length of time that they have been learning, their progress is not rapid enough. Furthermore, any additional skills and knowledge that pupils have acquired by the end of Year 4 are not taken into account and are not developed sufficiently in Years 5 and 6, including through composing activities.
- End-of-term musical productions involve all pupils in singing, which they do willingly and musically. Beyond this, though, there is only a unison choir that is attended by a very small number of younger girls. There are no additional extra-curricular instrumental ensembles.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is broadly satisfactory.

- Singing is led well in Key Stage 2 assemblies. The senior teacher rehearses pupils through confident modelling and accurate listening that correctly identifies and remedies what needs to be improved.
- Class teachers and teaching assistants present lessons confidently. Guided by the published schemes of work, they ensure that pupils always have practical activities to enjoy although in all cases there is more use of verbal explanation than there is of musical demonstration. However, because planning does not coordinate classroom and instrumental learning, insufficient account is taken of individual needs – particularly for those older students who continue with instrumental learning.
- Teaching by instrumental staff has a clear focus on technical and theoretical concepts and is supported by these teachers' secure musical skills and knowledge. However, pupils' misconceptions and mistakes, such as poor hand positions or breathing techniques, are not always identified or challenged quickly enough and, as a result, some poor habits develop.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- Commercially published schemes of work are used throughout the school for lessons taught by class teachers. While these are adapted to suit the teaching styles of individual teachers, they are not adapted to reflect pupils' musical abilities and experiences in other areas of musical learning. Most curriculum requirements are covered but there is no provision for

learning music through ICT in Key Stage 2 and pupils' knowledge of different musical styles and traditions is limited.

- Whole-class instrumental programmes are planned poorly. The Year 3 recorder scheme of work is scanty, with insufficient detail to promote an acceptable quality of learning. The Year 4 chalumeau programme is presented as a collection of PowerPoint presentations and backing tracks, without any indication of timescale or expectations for progress. They are not adapted sufficiently to reflect the needs of the pupils or the school.
- The lack of linkage between curriculum programmes is exacerbated by the fact that staff do not support or participate in the whole-class instrumental sessions.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- Because of the music coordinator's long-term absence, you have taken temporary leadership of music. You have ensured that curriculum provision has continued through class teachers and teaching assistants. You have helpfully prioritised school funds to augment delegated standards funding for music. These funds have been used to buy in self-employed staff, brokered by the city music service.
- Self-evaluation, particularly during the inspection, recognised concerns about the progress being made in instrumental work. You also recognise that the different aspects of provision are not sufficiently coordinated. Comparison of inspection findings with lesson observations that you made at the start of the school year confirmed that pupils' progress is poor. You also correctly recognise the higher standards and potential that pupils show through their vocal work.
- The new music coordinator's confident and successful leadership of singing assemblies is further evidence of the capacity to improve the effectiveness of music. You correctly recognise that this will also require discussions with the music service about assuring the quality of instrumental provision, and particularly the whole-class instrumental programme. This will be increasingly important next year, when a greater amount will be delegated to the school from the Music Education Grant.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- working in close partnership with the city music service to ensure that:
 - schemes of work for the whole-class instrumental programmes promote good standards of teaching and learning, are coordinated and link appropriately with other elements of the school's work in music
 - a greater proportion of students continue with instrumental tuition in Years 5 and 6, and that these pupils make more rapid progress in their learning

- significantly increasing the numbers of students participating in ensemble music-making by:
 - involving many more pupils from across the school in the choir, particularly boys
 - providing additional opportunities for performers of all instruments and from all year groups to play in additional ensembles
- ensuring that Key Stage 2 pupils have appropriate opportunities to use ICT to create and appraise music
- ensuring that all schemes of work in music, particularly in Key Stage 2, take full account of pupils' abilities and dispositions for music, leading to greater challenge and higher expectations in curriculum lessons.

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