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Ms W Thomas
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Dear Ms Thomas

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 12 July 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; analysis of pupils' work; observation of three class music lessons; observation of a Year 4 singing session and a rehearsal of the school orchestra; and a dress rehearsal for the Year 6 end-of-term performance.

The overall effectiveness of music is good with some outstanding features.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- Standards in music are firmly above average throughout the school, representing good progress for all groups of pupils given their generally above-average prior attainment when they join in Year 3. A key reason why pupils do well is because of the consistently good quality of classroom provision in playing instruments and creating musical ideas. Melodic and rhythmic understanding is developed securely through listening to music by established composers and then improvising around patterns taken from these pieces. The range of musical styles selected for this work is reasonably varied, but pupils are right to say that more emphasis could be given to contemporary musical styles to help broaden their cultural understanding.

- Singing is also developed well with standards securely above average including strong part singing featuring in all year groups. Tone quality, diction and phrasing are usually very good.
- Good numbers of pupils benefit from additional instrumental tuition and participation in regular extra-curricular music activities. The choir is well-established, although numbers have dipped recently. Involvement in music does much to raise the self-esteem of individual pupils and the school as a whole. All groups are represented, although it is noticeable that boys are not as well-represented as girls in extra-curricular musical activities.

Quality of teaching in music

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

- Class music lessons have a clear focus on improving musical understanding through a coordinated approach to developing pupils' aural perception and performing skills. Well-structured tasks encourage them to show this understanding through guided improvisation. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils listened carefully to an extract from Prokofiev's 'Romeo and Juliet' and were able to identify the use of minor arpeggios and dotted rhythms. Stave notation and mnemonics were used appropriately to underpin pupils' aural understanding. They then used the two ideas to invent their own short group pieces, each based on a different minor chord. To conclude, the teacher drew all the group pieces together to form a longer class composition, with great success.
- While these activities are very effective, too much time is spent in verbal exposition at the start of class music lessons, before pupils engage in practical music-making. A greater proportion of lesson time engaged with musical language would help pupils to make outstanding progress, because they would be able to develop their ideas in greater depth.
- The regular whole-year group singing lessons are led very well by the local authority Advanced Skills Teacher (AST). These sessions are underpinned by excellent musical pedagogy, including use of tonic-sol-fa which is understood very well by pupils. Although it is encouraging that class teachers support these sessions, their participation is inconsistent. Their more active involvement would help improve pupils' participation and achieve consistent standards across all singing activities.
- Regular audio recordings are made of pupils' work. There is some use of information and communication technology (ICT) in Year 6, but this aspect of teaching is not well developed.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- The classroom curriculum single-page overview gives an excellent insight into how pupils are expected to progress in their musical understanding from Years 3 to 6, with previous learning from Year 2 also clearly identified. This is supported by more detailed planning which shows how

different activities link together to promote progression. However, less attention is given to how the advanced skills of pupils who receive additional tuition might be extended through class work, and this is a key area for development.

- Although class music lessons with the music coordinator are rotated on a half-termly basis, each year group meets together on a weekly basis for singing practice and each class also benefits from drumming workshops, as part of the 'Wider Opportunities' initiative. This programme is enabled through the school's own finances, rather than through the government's standards funding for music.
- Well-established partnerships with the local authority music and school improvement services enable pupils to benefit from good programmes of additional tuition and a good range of extra-curricular activities. The school orchestra is a good size and performs to a good standard; the school plays a leading role in local music events and concerts.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is outstanding.

- The music coordinator is extremely well informed about issues in music education. She has taken advantage of a range of training opportunities, including through 'Sing Up!' (the national singing strategy) and other pedagogical approaches, such as Dalcroze Eurhythmics, and these approaches are used effectively in teaching.
- Equally strong leadership is provided for the weekly singing practices and the school orchestra rehearsals by the AST, who provides further links to networks such as the National Association of Music Educators (NAME). Other adults contribute well to the musical life of the school, including the Site Supervisor who runs a small popular music band.
- Self-evaluation is excellent. Prior to the inspection, you accurately judged the overall quality of provision as good; the music development plan shows precisely what needs to be done to enable outstanding outcomes for pupils. Governors are very supportive of music, including through the provision of additional funding for music.
- With the music coordinator leaving the school at the end of this term, you have appointed an experienced replacement. However, the success of music at Churchfields is not dependent on one person. The depth of provision and leadership; strong commitment to continuity and succession planning; the quality of self-evaluation and, not least, the good abilities and attitudes of pupils, give confidence in the school's capacity to bring about further sustained improvements in music.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- encouraging and enabling class teachers to take a more active role in the weekly singing sessions

- planning greater levels of challenge for more able pupils in class music lessons, including for those who benefit from additional instrumental tuition
- ensuring that maximum use is made of lesson time for active music-making and listening, minimising the time spent on verbal explanations.

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