

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



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Ms S Readings  
Headteacher  
Dormers Wells Junior School  
Dormers Wells Lane  
Southall  
UB1 3HX

Dear Ms Readings

### **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 13 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; video recordings of performances by the 'Wider Opportunities' classes and the school's cultural evening; analysis of pupils' work; observation of four class music lessons and a small group keyboard lesson; a visit to the Year 6 end-of-year production; and observation of a school choir rehearsal.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. The 'Wider Opportunities' programmes in Year 4, provided through the local authority music service, are planned appropriately and pupils make secure progress through these lessons. However, this is in contrast to provision and outcomes in class music during Years 3, 5 and 6. Curriculum planning for these year groups is poor and does not help staff to teach musically. Consequently, the overall standard of pupils' work at the end of Year 6 remains low.

### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Prior to joining the school in Year 3, pupils have low levels of general educational attainment. A number, including many who join the school at different points in the year, face some challenging circumstances. The 'Wider Opportunities' lessons in Year 4 provide a well-structured

programme in which two thirds of the year group make secure progress in learning the violin, cello, or recorder. Other pupils are offered a singing programme for the year. However, progress overall is negated by significant weaknesses in other aspects of the music curriculum. Although a small number of pupils continue with specialist instrumental tuition after Year 4, overall standards of playing instruments and in creating music remain low at the end of Year 6. Pupils' melodic and rhythmic understanding is underdeveloped. There are no regular school ensembles for instrumentalists from across the school to perform together.

- Standards of vocal work are below expectations. Most pupils participate willingly, but at the end of Year 6, singing remains in unison and intonation is noticeably variable. The school choir is attended by a satisfactory number of pupils and is led enthusiastically, but again singing remains in unison with overemphasis on volume and projection that leads to problems with tuning and tone quality.

### **Quality of teaching in music**

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Lesson plans and evaluations, together with teaching sampled during the inspection and video evidence, show that teaching by visiting instrumental staff from the local authority music service has a clear and appropriate focus on the development of correct instrumental techniques, and sound musical responses. Ideas are modelled confidently, either to lead or to support pupils in their music-making.
- Class teachers prepare individual lessons diligently. Resources are prepared professionally and teaching assistants are carefully managed. Great care is taken to ensure that these lessons are well structured and to set clear expectations for participation and behaviour. However, not nearly enough time is spent engaging pupils in meaningful musical activity. Much of this stems from teachers' lack of confidence for modelling and leading in music. Consequently, unnecessary time is spent explaining verbally to pupils and then asking pupils to respond through speaking and writing, rather than through music. An example of this was when pupils were asked to evaluate short, untuned percussion pieces that they had produced in a previous lesson. An extremely small proportion of the 30 minutes observed was taken in listening to the music; the great majority of the time was spent talking and writing. The pieces themselves were insufficiently structured and lacked rhythmic shape; the evaluation questions themselves lacked musical focus. This approach does not help pupils to improve their musical understanding.
- Class teachers lead vocal work, in the classroom and in the choir, with enthusiasm and encouragement. Again, however, verbal instructions and feedback dominate. Although errors of intonation, diction and rhythm are usually identified, pupils are not shown how to correct these.
- Class teachers are confident in using new technology to present lessons; it is also encouraging that they have good access to video and sound-recording equipment. However, pupils do not use information and

communication technology to help create, record, and manipulate musical ideas.

### **Quality of the curriculum in music**

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- The Year 4 programme is planned in detail, with clear expectations for the technical skills and music understanding that pupils are to develop through the year. It is particularly helpful that these plans, which are produced for use across a number of schools, have been reviewed and adapted to reflect the needs of pupils at Dormers Wells.
- Curriculum planning and content in other year groups are inadequate. There is no sense of progression or coordination across the key stage or within individual year groups. The Year 4 'Wider Opportunities' programme is not taken into account for other planning. Schemes of work in other year groups are patchy and do not promote satisfactory teaching and learning in music. The use of music in cross-curricular themes is not at all well considered. For example, as part of a project about the Second World War, pupils were invited to use song lyrics from the era as the basis for a rap. To prepare for this, they had listened to music by Eminem. However, they had little understanding of popular music from the 1940s, such as the swing band music of Glenn Miller.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in music**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is inadequate.

- Governors have invested heavily in the 'Wider Opportunities' programme for at least five years. You have also prioritised funding for additional instrumental tuition. In the challenging contexts within which the school works, this is very helpful, as is the clear commitment to inclusion shown by the equal involvement of pupils from different ethnic and ability groups in these activities.
- Despite this, it is clear that the coordination of music across the school is inadequate. The lack of coherence and cohesion in curriculum planning, with little regard to musical progression, mean that staff are not supported in or encouraged to teach musically. Monitoring of curriculum planning in music has been little and no formal observation has taken place of teaching, other than through the 'Wider Opportunities' programme.
- The music coordinator and other staff have not benefited from externally provided music-specific training and awareness of current developments in music education is little. The school makes use of online and printed resources from 'Sing Up!', but staff have not attended any training as part of the national singing strategy.

## **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- ensuring that curriculum planning promotes good musical learning for pupils and encourages staff to teach effectively by:
  - providing clear guidance about the musical progress that pupils are expected to make as they move through the school
  - integrating the 'Wider Opportunities' programme with the work of other year groups in partnership with the local authority music service, thus ensuring that the skills and understanding that pupils develop in Year 4 are continued and improved in subsequent years
  - insisting that all projects and topics, whether purely musical or cross-curricular, have robust and relevant musical learning objectives
- giving teachers the confidence and encouragement to teach effectively in music by developing class teachers' skills and confidence in modelling music and in using music, rather than the spoken and written word, as the target language in lessons
- more robustly monitoring the quality of curriculum planning and the quality of teaching in music
- providing the subject coordinator with high-quality continuing professional development opportunities in music, as a means of ensuring strong leadership in improving provision and outcomes for 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**