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12 July 2011

Mr C Meadows
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Meadows

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 27 and 28 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: discussions with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation, photographic evidence and some audio recordings of pupils' performances; observation of parts of eight lessons, five of which were jointly observed with you, and an assembly for pupils in Years 2 to 6.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. There are some strengths in instrumental learning, particularly for girls. However, significant weaknesses in the planning of the classroom curriculum mean that pupils' broader musical understanding and skills are not developed systematically as they move through the school. As a result, standards are below average overall and their progress is unsatisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Carefully planned music activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage enable these children to make satisfactory progress. Children are eager to lead activities and are successfully encouraged to use musical language in lessons.

- The development of pupils' musical skills as they move through the school is not systematic. Weaknesses in curriculum planning means that pupils' ability to create musical ideas and use these in their compositions is underdeveloped. Too often, similar rhythmic and group work is undertaken by pupils in different year groups. Pupils sing regularly and enthusiastically with some attention to musical detail. However, from a broadly average starting point, attainment, in most aspects of music education, is below average at the end of Year 6 and this represents inadequate achievement.
- A good proportion of pupils, especially girls, learn to play instruments and most achieve well in this aspect of musical learning. A reasonable number take part regularly in musical activities out of lesson times. Individual, ensemble and class performances take place frequently. These events are very much enjoyed by parents, carers and pupils alike and contribute significantly to raising pupils' self-confidence and esteem.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Teachers' lack of subject knowledge and their limited expertise to plan lessons that challenge pupils' different ability levels are key weaknesses. Too often, lessons are dominated by teachers, with pupils expected to talk about music rather than being creative and demonstrating their musical knowledge and understanding. Opportunities for pupils to apply previous learning and information from instrumental lessons and music workshops, in their class lessons, are limited.
- There is insufficient ongoing monitoring of individual pupils' progress. Consequently, teachers do not have enough information about pupils' abilities and their outside musical interests to enable them to plan appropriately. Pupils' musical progress is only assessed formally at the end of each year. Although occasional audio recordings of pupils' work are made, they are not used enough to enable pupils know how to improve their work.
- Pupils work well together and do their best to complete the tasks organised for them. Too often though, their learning is diminished because completing activities is the only method used to measure success.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- The curriculum is developed from commercial schemes and is linked into the creative themes adopted by the school. Careful attention is paid to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum are covered nominally; however, leaders recognise that the lack of resources means that pupils are unable to use information and communication technology (ICT) in their music lessons. Teachers demonstrate varied ability when adapting the different schemes. Consequently, insufficient attention is given to ensure that pupils' musical skills are developed systematically so that their learning is consolidated and they make appropriate progress.

- Although there are sufficient instruments for pupils to use, there are limited large instruments for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to use as part of their outdoor music provision.
- Opportunities for pupils to perform, and for some to attend music events out of school, are frequent. Ensembles, such as the recorder group, rehearse regularly. However, although singing is a normal part of class music lessons, there is no choir.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is inadequate.

- A full and frank discussion took place during the inspection and you recognise that, although performances happen regularly, not enough attention has been paid to classroom music provision in recent years. The subject's part-time coordinator ensures that opportunities are taken to involve pupils in external music activities, for example through the partnership links with Countersthorpe College Family of Schools; this is a positive feature of music in the school. However, the organisation of regular performances and other extra-curricular events have had considerably more attention than the mapping and monitoring the music provision in the classroom.
- The assessment system is unrefined and does not indicate individual pupils' musical strengths and musical understanding. Consequently, teachers cannot plan lessons appropriately for pupils' particular needs.
- The school was delegated standards funding for music last year from the local authority. This money was used to provide a one-day music drumming workshop for all pupils. Although they found this event very enjoyable, the skills and information learnt by pupils during the workshop have not been developed subsequently through regular tuition and practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the scheme of work for music is organised so that:
 - all planning shows clearly how pupils' musical skills and understanding are to be developed systematically and progressively as they move through the school
 - sufficient opportunities and resources are provided for pupils to use ICT to support their learning
- improving the quality of teaching by:
 - introducing a method of regularly assessing pupils' progress, then using this information, together with any additional knowledge, to plan musically challenging lessons that meet their individual needs and interests
 - enabling pupils to demonstrate musically their understanding of particular music words and concepts

- using audio recordings regularly so that pupils are involved in assessing their own work and identifying how improvements can be made
- providing appropriate subject support to those members of staff who find teaching music challenging.

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

Marianne Young
Her Majesty's Inspector