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Mr S Morton
Headteacher
St Mary and St John CofE VA Primary School
Church Street
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Dear Mr Morton

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 4 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 and a brass instrumental lesson; visits to the whole-school singing assembly and act of collective worship, a performance by the 'Wider Opportunities' ukulele classes, and rehearsals for the Year 6 end-of-term production.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Standards achieved currently in the upper years of Key Stage 2 are broadly average. Singing is generally enthusiastic although intonation, phrasing and expression are variable, particularly with older pupils. Pupils are able to create their own music to depict particular moods and situations but with some limitations in their control of melodic and rhythmic ideas. Given these pupils' overall starting points when they joined the school, this represents satisfactory progress overall. However, you recognise that a significant number of pupils are musically and generally more able, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and that musical expectations for these pupils should be higher.

- Year 3 and 4 students have made good progress during the short ukulele programme that they have recently enjoyed as part of the Wider Opportunities initiative.
- Around one in every four pupils benefits from regular additional instrumental tuition. However, apart from opportunities for a small number of pupils to accompany singing during collective worship, there are no extended, regular instrumental ensembles.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Whole-school singing is led confidently by the music coordinator, including through excellent modelling. This is not the case in other vocal work, where lapses in intonation and tone quality are left unchallenged.
- All curriculum lessons include a practical music-making focus. However, greater emphasis is placed on securing pupils' theoretical understanding than on securing their musical understanding. Pupils are encouraged to use technical language when talking and writing about music, but they do not always understand and recognise these concepts aurally. Consequently, they gain greater knowledge about music than they do of music.
- Although teachers are well aware of individual pupils' musical abilities, including those who have benefited from additional tuition, these skills are not considered sufficiently in lesson planning.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- All curriculum requirements are met, including for using information and communication technology to support musical learning. Published materials are adapted well by teachers to suit their own methods but are not modified successfully to reflect pupils' abilities or to promote good musical learning.
- Partnerships within the local authority, the local schools cluster, and the local community enable pupils to access a good range of additional instrumental tuition and participate vocally in local events, such as the recent 'Four Winds' festival on Rutland Water. However, access to regular extended ensemble music making is more limited. While pupils have made good progress in the ukulele project, which has been much enjoyed, the programme is shorter than those typically experienced as part of the Wider Opportunities initiative.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory with good features.

- Initial self-evaluation was overgenerous because it did not judge achievement in the context of pupils' abilities; however, you recognise correctly that the next stage of improving music is to give all class teachers the confidence to teach with an emphasis on developing pupils' musical understanding so that they make better than satisfactory progress. The music coordinator has a well-considered plan for improving the quality of teaching and learning. While there is a clear vision for the development of music, because the music coordinator only works in the school for half of the week it is has proved more difficult to maintain and support provision consistently.
- The music coordinator has good awareness of current thinking in vocal education and she has built good networks with other singing professionals. Awareness of other broader initiatives in music education, such as the Key Stage 2 continuing professional development programme, is not so strong.
- While secure partnerships are in place with self-employed teachers to provide instrumental tuition, this work is not fully coordinated with class music provision. Furthermore, the partnerships do not extend to providing pupils with access to regular large ensemble activities in school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the effectiveness of teaching in music by:
 - ensuring that planning takes full account of the particular skills and abilities that pupils acquire outside of class lessons
 - ensuring that teaching is of music, rather than about music, and that words are used to support musical learning rather than drive it
- providing significantly improved opportunities for pupils of all ages to develop and enjoy their ensemble playing and singing skills
- insisting that high expectations are shown in all vocal work through robust projection of good intonation, expression, and phrasing.

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