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Mrs A McDermid
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs McDermid

Ofsted 2012–13 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 1 and 2 May 2012 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; discussions with the curriculum support teacher and head of Gateshead Music Service; the scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of five class lessons and a Key Stage 2 singing assembly.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Overall, children join the school with greater levels of disadvantage than is typically the case nationally. During their time in the Foundation Stage, they make exceptional progress. They learn to sing confidently, in tune and with good expression, and they develop a very good sense of pulse and rhythm. Their sense of joy in music lessons is palpable.
- Progress in the rest of the school is not nearly as impressive and is just satisfactory. While pupils continue to enjoy participating, standards throughout Key Stages 1 and 2 are broadly in line with expectations, at best. Most pupils sing confidently and with enthusiasm; they willingly experiment with sounds and create their own ideas, but their knowledge and understanding of melodic and rhythmic devices is noticeably limited.

- Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to participate in whole-school and year-group musical performance, including at Christmas and the end of the school year. The school choir performs in local and regional events. However, very few pupils are learning to play musical instruments through regular additional tuition.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Teaching provided by the curriculum support teacher in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is outstanding, because it focuses simply and yet also rigorously on the rapid improvement of children's vocal and rhythmic skills. This teaching is underpinned by a robust music education philosophy and methodology, including the Kodaly system.
- In Key Stages 1 and 2, teachers have established strong working relationships with pupils, and plan lessons with commendable thoroughness. However, pupils' musical progress is no better than satisfactory because teachers spend too much time talking about the tasks that are to be undertaken, with insufficient time spent leading the class in musical activity. Furthermore, expectations are only moderately challenging and do not recognise sufficiently the age-related musical progression that should be expected. For example, in a Key Stage 2 lesson, too much time was spent exploring the difference between high and low pitches, when this concept had already been covered in earlier years.
- One very positive aspect of teaching is the emerging use of hand-held devices and other portable digital technology to make recordings of pupils' work. These are used effectively to help pupils listen to and improve their work; in the Year 5 lesson observed, imaginative use was made of an iPad to record natural sounds in the forest classroom, for future use in computer-sequenced composition work.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Planning, including through cross-curricular topic work, is sufficient to ensure that pupils have regular access to an appropriate range of music activities. However, this planning shows limited recognition of how pupils' musical skills, knowledge and understanding should develop as they progress through the school.
- Resources for classroom music are broadly satisfactory; a wider range of tuned percussion instruments and keyboards would help to promote higher expectations for work with older pupils.
- The partnership with Gateshead Music Service to provide teaching in the EYFS is extremely effective. Demonstration concerts, also organised through the music service, are popular with pupils. However, it is disappointing that this partnership does not extend to the provision of

regular additional instrumental tuition. The school no longer participates in the 'Wider Opportunities' programme, although plans are being made for the school to offer its own whole-class ukulele tuition scheme from September 2012.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- The acting music coordinator is a confident musician and a good role-model when leading singing and classroom teaching. The senior team has a strong sense of corporate responsibility for curriculum planning; while this approach ensures that all pupils have regular access to class music time, less consideration has been given to planning musical progression across the school. This is a key reason for pupils' limited musical progress.
- Self-evaluation is good, accurately recognising both the strength of teaching and learning in the EYFS and the more limited effectiveness of pupils' musical achievement elsewhere in the school. You accompanied me to all class lessons during the inspection, and our observations concurred on all occasions.
- Three members of staff have benefitted from training courses provided by 'Sing Up' at The Sage, Gateshead. However, limited understanding remains about wider aspects of class teaching in music. You rightly recognise that more could be done to complement teachers' generic class-management skills with subject-specific training.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- in partnership with Gateshead Music Service, ensuring that pupils are able to access and enjoy whole-class and other additional instrumental tuition
- developing a programme of training that makes good use of teachers' generic class-management skills alongside musical expertise from the music service
- providing a clear long-term curriculum plan that articulates high expectations for pupils' musical progression, and which sets clear ambitions for high standards in class music lessons – particularly for the development of pupils' melodic and rhythmic skills.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in the school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector