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Ms C Draper  
Executive Headteacher  
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Dear Ms Draper

### **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 13 June 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, pupils and the head of Walsall Arts and Events; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work, including recordings of their performances and compositions; and observation of four class lessons, all made jointly with senior staff, an assembly, a choir rehearsal and a small group brass lesson.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory.

#### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is satisfactory.

- Throughout each key stage, pupils make satisfactory progress and reach average attainment. By the end of Year 6, pupils can count a steady beat accurately; read and tap simple rhythm patterns; compose simple pieces in which they apply practically musical elements such as pitch, metre and dynamics appropriately; and discuss their work with reasonable confidence. Their knowledge of classical music is limited and they are not always confident to sing out loud or with sufficient accuracy.
- A fair proportion of pupils take part in activities outside of class lessons, such as the choir and instrumental lessons, which are provided at a cost heavily subsidised by the school. Girls predominate in these activities,

though a core of boys is also involved. Pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those identified with special educational needs are underrepresented. The school has identified this and is considering strategies to improve the situation.

- Pupils show great enthusiasm for and enjoyment of music. The school's self-evaluation correctly identifies this and recognises that it provides a platform for raising attainment.

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

The quality of teaching in music is satisfactory.

- Music is taught by each class teacher. Teachers and teaching assistants demonstrate real enthusiasm for the subject, which is 'caught' by pupils. Lessons are suitably planned and paced. They are practical in nature so pupils are fully immersed in enjoyable musical activity.
- However, due to limitations in their subject knowledge, teachers' musical expectations of pupils are sometimes too low, or unrealistic. Teachers too rarely sing or play to the pupils, although their spoken explanations are clear. In three lessons observed, staff made musical errors, leading to pupils also making mistakes in counting beats or clapping quavers.
- Teachers assess pupils' attainment in music accurately, although this is not moderated across the school. In individual lessons, all pupils are included very well. However, pupils' particular musical interests or skills are not always provided for.
- The teaching observed in the group brass lesson, by a teacher from the local authority Forest Arts music service, was very good. Pupils made rapid progress, building on their previous learning, and using their developing understanding of elements such as dynamics to improve their performances.

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

The quality of the curriculum in music is satisfactory.

- Sufficient time is given to the subject and teachers firmly protect its place in the curriculum. Teachers' medium- and short-term planning is detailed and suitably focused on musical objectives with an appropriate balance of composing, performing and appraising.
- However, too much about lesson content is left to individual class teachers to decide. As a result, the development of pupils' musical skills and knowledge is not logically and progressively planned throughout the school. Also, undue inconsistencies exist between classes. In Year 5, at the inspection, one class was learning basic recorder technique, as the teacher attempted to link this to a Tudor history project, while the parallel class studied beat and rhythm. While pupils have many worthwhile musical experiences, the randomness of the provision, and lack of reference to previous and future learning, hinders them in building their learning

coherently and rapidly. This is the main reason that their progress is not better than satisfactory.

- Senior leaders hope to re-instate the Wider Opportunities programme next year. This had mixed success in the past. Pupils enjoyed it and developed skills in playing the violin, but the programme contributed less well to their broader musical development as it was not well linked to other aspects of their musical learning.
- The subject is well resourced with a plethora of high-quality tuned and untuned instruments, as well as dedicated studio space. These are well used and readily available to pupils. However, singing is underused in the curriculum as a tool for learning. The school uses information and communication technology (ICT) increasingly frequently to record pupils' musical compositions and performances but is not yet using this sufficiently to help pupils evaluate and improve their work.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is satisfactory.

- Senior staff view music and its place in the school very positively. They actively encourage musical activity among pupils and staff. Their evaluation of the subject is accurate and mainly accords with the inspection evidence.
- As a consequence, they have begun to take sensible steps to improve the subject and raise attainment. Noting the lack of coherence in the curriculum, they have aptly decided to move to having an individual subject leader from September. The current arrangement, where several staff share management responsibility, and the previous 'creative team' led to a lack of clear musical leadership. One teacher, with suitable subject expertise, has made a promising start in identifying a progression of skills and knowledge in music across the four years, with the possibility of developing this into a full scheme of work.

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

- developing a robust and coherent scheme of work which ensures that
  - pupils make good progress through rigorous and progressive development of their musical skills, knowledge and understanding
  - staff understand and can explain to pupils how individual units of work fit into the big picture of musical learning
  - singing by staff and pupils is used well as a tool for learning
  - pupils develop a better appreciation of classical music
  - if Wider Opportunities is re-instated, it is well integrated with other musical learning
- ensuring that staff have sufficient subject expertise so that they can always demonstrate and explain correctly to pupils

- using external training, as needed, for example from the Forest Arts music service, to ensure that the new subject leader has the support and expertise needed to bring change in a timely way
- moderating staff assessments of pupils in music
- developing the use of ICT to help pupils evaluate and improve their musical work.

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

**Robin Hammerton**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**