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Mr J Parry
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Parry

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 28 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 Brent Music Service; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; attendance at a choir rehearsal and a school concert; and observation of four lessons across all key stages.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make a sound start in their music making. They enjoy making and using instruments, and sing regularly to an appropriate standard. They are confident to discuss their learning, including describing sounds. They listen to the work of others respectfully and quietly.
- Throughout Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils make good progress, especially in performance, where they attain much better than age-related expectations. In the concert, both Year 2 classes sang and played together a quiet song in harmony at a very high standard. Older pupils played instrumental solos and duets capably. Pupils in all year groups demonstrate good aural skills, and use a variety of instruments technically

very well and to good musical effect. All learn to play recorder and djembe drums with assurance. They sing accurately and confidently.

- Pupils show interest in each other's performances and appraise these carefully. Their understanding and experience of popular and world musics is good but limited in respect of Western art-music. Pupils improvise well during practices and performances but have fewer opportunities to compose more lengthy pieces. By Year 6, they know about pulse, rhythm, chords and scales, for example, but sometimes need reminders to help them explain why these are important and how they can be used.
- A good number of pupils, from all groups, participate to a good standard in the school choir, instrumental ensemble, musical productions and instrumental lessons. The choir's repertoire, however, is too heavily focused on pop music. Staff have successfully encouraged many boys to join the instrumental ensemble. Pupils perform at many school, community and borough events.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- From Year 1 upwards, weekly class music teaching is led very effectively by staff from the Brent Music Service. Class teachers and teaching assistants also participate in the lessons and continue them at other times; this is an effective form of training for non-specialists.
- Class music lessons are very well planned and rapidly paced. Music Service teachers communicate their strong subject expertise to pupils very well through singing, playing and talking. Resources are well organised. Technical skills, such as how to blow and hold recorders correctly, are well taught and established. Pupils enjoy these exciting lessons greatly. They copy their teachers adeptly if learning a song, for example, or performing an instrumental motif. However, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to deepen understanding by explaining the musical principles involved in what the pupils are doing. In an initial lesson about African drumming, for example, pupils quickly learned to perform a complex, four beat ostinato pattern accurately, but the teacher did not explain what it was or how it linked to previous learning.
- Teachers assess pupils' musical learning accurately. The assessments are well used to identify pupils who might particularly benefit from learning an instrument or joining a musical group. The fast pace of lessons, however, means that sometimes staff do not always have time to support pupils who need more help to achieve a skill or understand an idea.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is good.

- In Nursery and Reception, music is provided suitably through normal class activity. From Year 1 upwards, the curriculum used is the Brent Music Service's 'Music'sCool' scheme, largely delivered by the service's teachers.

- This scheme is detailed and well organised and provides logical, progressive steps in exciting musical learning. It gives a very high profile to performance, leading to the very high standards in this area. Less prominence is given to appraising and, particularly, composing. Furthermore, the scheme offers pupils wide experience in pop and world music but much less in folk or classical music. Coherently argued, historic local reasons exist for these emphases but school leaders and the Head of Brent Music Service, in discussion, recognised that they need re-balancing.
- The resources for music are very good. A wide range of pitched and unpitched instruments is available, carefully and efficiently chosen to support the curriculum, and a well-organised music room. Singing is very well used to support learning and in performance.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is good.

- The headteacher and senior leaders give high priority and much encouragement to pupils' participation in music. They see it rightly as a key part of a broader school-improvement agenda.
- The considerable financial commitment in employing Music Service staff exemplifies this. Wisely, school leaders do not simply delegate music provision to the visiting staff alone but involve their own staff as partners. This is successful in promoting good outcomes, which the school has correctly evaluated. However, the school has accepted the Music Service teaching and curriculum as they are without closely checking how tightly they meet the school's bespoke needs and policies. Consequently, some weaknesses remain. In part to try to take music from good to outstanding, the advanced skills teacher is to become subject leader from September.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- refining the curriculum so that it contains more opportunities for pupils to compose their own music and enables them to enjoy and appraise Western art-music styles
- improving teaching by
 - explaining to pupils the musical principles involved in their practical work clearly and explicitly
 - ensuring that staff check how well pupils are learning in each lesson and help them to overcome any difficulties
- broadening the repertoire of the school choir.

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