

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs D Stendall
Headteacher
Selston Arts and Community College
Chapel Road
Selston
Nottinghamshire
NG16 6BW

Dear Mrs Stendall

Ofsted subject inspection programme – Music

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on Monday 04 and Tuesday 05 December 2006 to look at work in music.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the extent to which every pupil was benefiting from your music provision. In particular, it sought to explore the links you may have developed with other schools and agencies, such as the local Music Service or other professional musicians, in order to improve continuity and increase opportunity for all your pupils.

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 unless to highlight exceptional practice. In such circumstances the school would be contacted prior to publication to agree the exact wording. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with the headteacher, senior staff with the line management responsibility for music, other arts faculty staff and the music staff; discussion with pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work including audio recordings; and observation of four music lessons and one after school music activity.

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are inadequate.

- Standards are below expectations at Key Stage 3. Pupils make slow progress and underachieve because the curriculum and the teaching do not provide enough challenge.
- Standards in Key Stage 4 have been inadequate over the past few years, although they are improving. This year, all three girls who took the exam managed to achieve the higher grades. However, these pupils were all instrumentalists who took the GCSE course after school. GCSE music is currently not timetabled as part of the Key Stage 4 curriculum.
- While the standards of performance in the extra-curricular activities are satisfactory, and there are signs of improvement in the school choir, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to extend their musical skills and interests.
- Behaviour in most lessons is satisfactory. Pupils arrive eager to learn but do not always exhibit positive attitudes to learning in music.

Quality of teaching and learning in music

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate.

- Whilst activities are planned conscientiously, there is insufficient challenge in the teaching to ensure all pupils get the most out of the learning opportunities. Objectives for each lesson lack sufficient clarity for pupils to understand what they need to learn and recognise what they have learned. There are low expectations of musical outcomes and a lack of understanding of the National Curriculum levels of attainment.
- Assessment is regular, but over-generous and focused more on task completion rather than musical outcome.
- While musically able pupils are supported through some extra-curricular groups, support and guidance for the majority of pupils is inadequate.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate.

- The music scheme of work lacks progression through the various units. For example, there is a lack of clarity of how pupils will develop musical skills, knowledge and understanding and how each unit builds on previous learning to enable pupils to achieve higher standards.
- The extended curriculum is narrow and limited to a few ensembles.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are inadequate.

- The department has received support from senior management in the school and more recently from the Local Authority Advanced Skills Teacher. However, this has not had demonstrable impact on raising standards or improving the quality of teaching.
- The development of departmental self evaluation has been well supported by the school senior leadership team and the music self-evaluation documentation is honest and realistic. Even so, the department has yet to show the capacity to improve standards of music in the school.
- Accommodation and resources for learning are inadequate. There are insufficient practice rooms, computers, and instrumental resources to meet the needs of the curriculum.

Subject issues

1. Year 6/7 Baseline Data

Baseline testing is inadequate. There is no robust system in place for the music baseline testing of pupils when they enter the school in Year 7.

2. Music Partnerships

Currently, formal partnership links with outside music agencies are inadequate. However, despite music not being named as one of the Arts College targeted subjects, there are good plans to involve more professional musicians in the curriculum as part of the broader Arts College links with the regional arts and district council.

Inclusion

While the school is committed to the inclusion agenda, there is insufficient on-going focus on developing a music curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils. However, the annual school production attracts large numbers of pupils with a wide range of abilities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the progression of skills, knowledge and understanding is mapped clearly in the music scheme of work
- improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and raising teacher expectations of musical outcomes
- broadening the range of extended curricular opportunities to meet the musical interests of a wider range of pupils.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Clive Kempton HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector