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Mr A Yates
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Dear Mr Yates

Ofsted subject inspection programme – Music

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 04 and 05 of 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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons, ensembles, instrumental tuition and a Year 8 assembly.

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Pupils enter school with a wide range of musical skills but with standards that are broadly average. By the end of Year 9 their standards remain average, which constitutes satisfactory achievement. Pupils enjoy music lessons and they like to use the keyboards to perform their pieces. Pupils in Key Stage 3 do not have enough understanding of musical terminology and do not experience enough music. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 are below the level they should be for their age.
- The pupils that opt to follow the GCSE course are good performers on their chosen instruments. Standards are above average with strong performance skills but listening skills are weaker. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory when compared to their standards on entry to the course. They attain higher standards because teaching is more organised and ensures pupils focus on the examination requirements.
- Standards of musical groups are broadly average. The school does not have a large number of instrumentalists of a high standard and this restricts the quality of some performances.

Quality of teaching and learning of music

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Because lessons have a suitable focus on music making most pupils learn satisfactorily. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. It is characterised by secure subject knowledge and effective use of demonstration to encourage pupils as they perform. Working relationships between teacher and pupils are strong and this enables pupils to contribute ideas and views confidently. Consequently, they enjoy music lessons.
- However, work is not always well matched to the musical skills of pupils. Higher attainers sometimes find the work too easy, whilst lower attainers can occasionally struggle to make progress and quickly lose interest. The pace of learning often drops because lessons focus too much on one task rather than having a variety of sequential activities to keep pupils interested. Marking of work is poor, lacking in comments to help the pupils understand how well they are doing and how to improve.
- The quality of the instrumental tuition is satisfactory but only a relatively low number of pupils learn to play instruments in school.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The overall quality of the curriculum and extra-curricular provision is inadequate.

- In Years 7 and 8 pupils only receive half the recommended time for music and this restricts the full coverage of the statutory requirements for the subject. Schemes of work have not been modified sufficiently to ensure that all programmes of study are covered in the reduced time. Previous musical skills are not built upon sufficiently. As at the time of the last inspection, pupils in Key Stage 3 do not use computers enough to create, manipulate and refine their pieces. Although music now has a higher profile within school

the playing of music as pupils enter assembly is tokenistic because it is not followed up or made relevant to the pupils' learning.

- Music does not have enough impact on those pupils that do not learn an instrument or opt to study GCSE music. There is an adequate range of musical activities for pupils to participate in but these are mainly restricted to lunchtimes. Pupils often eat their lunch as they play their instruments or sing and this goes unchallenged by teachers. Although performance opportunities are increasing they are not as well developed as they could be. However, through the school's work as a specialist business and enterprise college some new performance opportunities have arisen such as the 'Battle of the bands' competition and the involvement with a local theatre company. Regular visits to perform in the local community also enrich some pupils' learning.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are inadequate.

- The overall provision for music has improved since the previous inspection when it was judged to be unsatisfactory. Senior managers initiated a range of strategies to improve GCSE results and this has worked well. The 2006 music results were the highest ever at 90% A*-C grades. Music and, in particular, drama are a growing part of school life and contribute satisfactorily to the emotional and personal development of an increasing number of pupils.
- While curriculum management has improved at Key Stage 4, the schemes of work for Key Stage 3 have not been modified to ensure all aspects are covered within the greatly reduced curriculum time. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 still do not have enough access to music technology and planning for this is poor. The departmental development plan is not robust enough in recognising weaknesses or identifying the actions that need to be taken.
- Teaching has not kept up to date with developments in music education and the subject manager does not have sufficient knowledge of the latest national initiatives for music. Documentation is too generic and not used consistently in practice.

Subject issue

Data collection

- Overall this aspect is inadequate. Links with feeder schools are limited and collection of information is poor. Initial information obtained as pupils enter the school is vague and does not provide a solid basis for evaluation. The local music service provides a list of incoming instrumentalists but this is not followed up robustly. Consequently, a number of pupils drop out of instrumental lessons as they join St Bede's. Record keeping systems are weak and there is insufficient recognition of previous work in lesson planning. No records are kept of pupils' involvement in extra-curricular activities and the progress they make in instrumental lessons.

Inclusion

- All ensembles are open to any pupil regardless of ability. The GCSE course is open to pupils who have attained a reasonable standard on an instrument or voice and have an understanding of musical notation. Musical events engage pupils but the numbers participating are low. Music does not have enough impact on the lives of all pupils in school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that music gets sufficient curriculum time in Key Stage 3 to cover all aspects of the statutory programmes of study
- ensuring pupils in Years 7 to 9 regularly use computers to enhance the music they create
- ensuring lessons fully engage pupils in learning through a range of well matched work, so that they make as much progress as possible
- improving the collection of data on pupils' standards and progress and use it to inform planning in order to raise standards.

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

Anthony Briggs
Additional Inspector