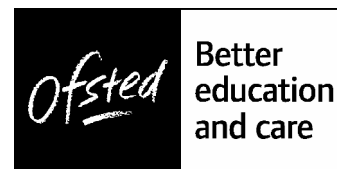


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23 November 2006

Mr Loughton
Headteacher
Joseph Whitaker School
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Dear Mr Loughton

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 14 and 15 November 2006. At the end of the inspection I fed back my judgements and this letter is to confirm my findings.

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 is benefiting from your music provision. It also explored the links you have developed with other schools and agencies, such as the local Music Service.

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 members of staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons and extra curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good overall.

- Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3 and achieve broadly in line with national expectations by the end of the key stage. They sing confidently and perform well on the keyboards.
- Attainment in Key Stage 4 has improved over the last two years and is above the national average. The size of the examination groups has increased and pupils achieve well in comparison with other subjects. Students in the sixth form make satisfactory progress and attain in line with national averages.
- There are good and some outstanding standards of performance in extra-curricular activities, for example in the swing band. Pupils speak highly of the variety of musical opportunities and of how these activities contribute significantly to their overall enjoyment of school. Significant numbers of pupils are involved in whole school music events.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- There are excellent working relationships between staff and pupils and the music team has a high level of musical expertise. Good classroom displays help pupils understand key musical vocabulary and gain familiarity with the national curriculum levels. However, while pupils know the level of work they are achieving they are not always aware of what they need to do to improve their work further.
- Pupils generally enjoy music lessons although there are times when the work does not engage pupils sufficiently for the whole lesson. Opportunities are sometimes missed to extend pupils' learning through moving too quickly on to the next task. There are also times when some pupils need more support.
- The modelling of performance skills by the music team is excellent. For example, the head of department raised the standards of work by her excellent performance on the keyboard within several groups. Another music teacher also contributed significantly through performing in these groups. However, while the modelling is excellent, pupils would have benefited from more direct challenge and systematic focus on specific aspects of the music.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The well conceived scheme of work is displayed effectively so that everyone knows what is included. The content of the curriculum is generally organised well although tasks are not always planned effectively. Lessons make good use of keyboards and there are good opportunities for singing. However, pupils rightly identify the range of instruments as being too limited. Resources and accommodation also lack attention and care

which does not help to inspire and encourage more pupils to get involved in the good variety of musical opportunities available to them. The school has excellent plans to improve accommodation significantly but urgent attention is needed to improve the quality of resources including music for performance and study at GCSE and GCE.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good overall.

- The music department is led with considerable energy and enthusiasm and is well supported within the arts faculty, although it is recognised that more opportunity is needed for the head of department to share good practice with other specialists within and beyond the school. Pupils speak very highly of the support provided by all of the teachers in the faculty and how they all take an interest in the musical activities. The whole school arts events have had a significant impact on pupils, staff and on the school community.
- While senior managers are appreciative of the contribution of music and the arts there is a lack of detailed knowledge about both the strengths and the areas that need further support. However, there is a clear commitment to improving communication channels and increasing opportunities for teachers to observe each other's lessons in order to support focussed professional dialogue. There is also clear recognition that the potential contribution of music to further school improvement has yet to be maximised fully.

Subject issues: Data collection and partnerships

- The collection and use of data on pupils' musical needs and interests are satisfactory overall. While pupils have increasingly helpful information about their musical progress in the classroom, the collection, analysis and effective use of information about pupils' prior learning and involvement in other musical experiences are at a relatively early stage of development.
- Partnerships with others are satisfactory overall. Of particular note is the broader arts link with Newark and Sherwood Arts which includes the recent successful bid for involvement in a film project.

Inclusion

- There is good inclusion of pupils in the provision for music. While there are fewer opportunities for boys to sing, the good range of extra-curricular activities provides opportunity for all pupils to extend their musical experiences. The analysis of pupils involved in instrumental lessons show that equal opportunities are provided for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing consistency in teaching by ensuring all work is planned effectively
- improving the fabric of the music department and the quality of musical resources including a wider range of instruments in the classroom and musical repertoire for performance and study at GCSE and GCE
- providing more opportunities for the music teachers to share good practice within and beyond the school.

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

A copy of this feedback will be sent to your local authority and will be available to the next institutional inspection team and will be published.

In 6-12 months after the inspection visit, we would like to gather information on the impact of this inspection on the improvements in this subject in your school. To this end you may be contacted by telephone or sent a questionnaire to complete. We appreciate your co-operation in this evaluation.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Knight
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools