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Mr Forster
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Forster

Ofsted subject inspection programme – Music

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 and 13 of February 2007 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 and ensembles.

The overall effectiveness of music was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Pupils enter Meadowdale with below average musical skills. Year 5 pupils quickly develop confident performance skills and can demonstrate these

effectively using keyboards and tin whistles. They are treated to a menu of highly practical musical activities that ensure that by Year 6 they are achieving standards that are broadly average. This good achievement is the result of effective specialist teaching and good deployment of resources. Pupils' very positive attitudes to learning also contribute significantly to their achievement.

- By Year 8, standards have been maintained and pupils continue to build on their musical knowledge. Higher attaining pupils are confident performers and singers and can notate their carefully structured pieces accurately. Lower attainers struggle with traditional notation, often putting letter names under notes in order to play their piece. Many pupils understand musical vocabulary such as triads and timbre and can create simple structured ballad style songs. However, pupils have not got the music technology skills normally found because they do not use computers in music lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning of music

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teaching is characterised by secure subject knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject. Relationships between teacher and pupils are good and this enables pupils to freely contribute their ideas and suggestions without fear of criticism. Consequently, they really enjoy music lessons. In the best lessons pupils are involved in musical activities from beginning to end, often incorporating movement in response to music such as ceilidh dancing. These activities have a good focus on learning and are delivered in a practical way. Pupils enjoy these lessons the most because there is a good balance of fun and hard work. However, not all work is matched successfully to the needs of every child.
- Resources are used effectively to engage learners and pupils value the regular opportunities to use keyboards and tin whistles. What is to be learnt is usually shared with the pupils at the outset but not all lessons end by consolidating what has been achieved. Good demonstration of, for example, tin whistle playing, results in pupils understanding exactly what is possible and they appreciate that the teacher is a musician as well as a teacher.
- Assessment procedures have improved since the previous inspection but pupils do not know how well they are doing in relation to National Curriculum levels. Marking of work does not always help the pupil to improve. Comments are not consistently applied and range from detailed constructive analysis to cursory ticks or kind but unhelpful comments such as: 'good so far' or 'a good attempt'.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum is planned to ensure all pupils experience a good range of musical activities in lessons. There is a good emphasis on creativity and

pupils speak highly of the strong focus on making music. However, although pupils regularly use electronic keyboards they do not use computers with music software. Consequently, they are not able to manipulate or refine their pieces. This means that the information and communication technology (ICT) requirement for the subject is not being met, even though it was identified as a weakness at the last inspection. The music technology capabilities offered through electronic keyboards are not used enough, and their use is restricted to that of a piano keyboard rather than exploring the wealth of additional features these instruments have to offer.

- Extra-curricular musical activities remain strong. There is an adequate range of musical activities for pupils to participate in and the six visiting instrumental/vocal teachers provide lessons to over 100 pupils.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory.

- The department is managed well on a day-to-day basis and the tuition of the large number of instrumentalists is handled effectively. As a result, pupils achieve well and enjoy the subject. Resources and accommodation have improved considerably. However, there are aspects of management that lack rigour. The departmental development plan does not have measurable outcomes, timelines or costings. The schemes of work have not yet been revised to fully account for the increased lesson time in Years 5 and 7 and the reduction in Year 8. In addition, there is no planning for ICT.
- Although evaluation and monitoring of teaching and learning takes place it is not robust enough and focuses too much on teaching rather than the outcomes on learning. Departmental and whole school self-evaluation is weak. Again, there is not enough focus on outcomes.
- The subject leader does not have sufficient awareness of the latest national initiatives for music. For example, there has been no involvement in, or knowledge of, the 'wider opportunities' initiative. The teacher has not attended enough professional development training events to ensure teaching is as up-to-date as it should be.

Subject issues

Partnerships

- Partnerships are inadequate. The department has not established sufficient partnerships with other schools or organisations. Although the subject leader has tried there are no established departmental links between Meadowdale and the two high schools it provides pupils for. Links with the local authority music service are also weak and rely mainly on contact with the visiting teachers. The lack of awareness of latest initiatives for music is also symptomatic of this weak aspect of the department's work.

Inclusion

- Music is an integral part of school life and has a positive impact on the lives of all the pupils in school; it contributes well to the emotional and personal development of pupils. Music has been celebrated through events such as the 'music day' when the timetable was suspended and all pupils enjoyed musical activities for the whole day. Many pupils learn instruments and there are lots of opportunities for pupils to take part in music related activities regardless of their skills. Lessons ensure that all pupils can create something and make some level of progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that pupils get access to computers with music software in order to cover all aspects of the statutory programmes of study
- improving teaching by better matching activities to the needs of all pupils and ensure marking informs the pupils how well they are doing and what they need to do to get better
- tightening management so that it robustly evaluates the learning taking place, updates schemes of work and rigorously evaluates how well things are going
- improving the partnerships with other schools and organisations in order to share information and ensure continued progress.

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