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Mr David Picton-Jones
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Dear Mr Picton-Jones

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 28 June 2007. 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. I am particularly grateful for you offering to record the work of a group of pupils in Year 4 and the learning of a new song by pupils in the singing assembly. 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: discussions with members of staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons, including the instrumental/vocal programme for all pupils in Year 3, a singing assembly and a range of extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding overall.

- The quality of singing is of the very highest standard. Pupils sing musically with considerable musical sensitivity and control in lessons and in the regular singing assemblies. Pupils learn new songs very quickly.
- Standards in lessons are always at least good and pupils make excellent progress overall. Performance skills are particularly strong. This was seen in the impressive performance of pupils in Year 6 who were learning to play Samba. In one lesson they learned a range of musical techniques and performed as an ensemble with considerable confidence. It was also seen in the performances on glockenspiels by a Year 6 class and in the extra-curricular djembe drum group.
- While there are good opportunities for pupils' creative development this aspect of music making is not as developed as performance. However, there were excellent examples of creative work by some pupils, notably by one group in the Year 4 class. Creativity was also seen in the lunch-time activity where pupils composed music to their own films and, most impressively, by a rock group of Year 6 boys who composed their own music of exceptional standard for this key stage.
- Pupils are totally engaged in music and love their music making. Pupils' personal development is significantly enhanced through music. For example, older pupils lead sessions for younger pupils. The pupils interviewed during the inspection provided extremely mature, thoughtful and perceptive observations.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teaching is always at least good and some is outstanding. Pupils learn quickly as a result of the high expectations and attention to musical detail. Lessons have real pace and tasks are planned well.
- In the best sessions, nothing less than the pupils' best work is accepted. However, some learning objectives are not yet centred on the musical skills to be developed and pupils are not always sure about what they can do to provide a better answer or piece of work.
- In the excellent Samba session the teacher modelled the work constantly and pupils learned through watching, listening and doing rather than just being told. In this way the pupils made maximum use of their musical intelligence and made rapid progress. The singing sessions achieved outstanding standards and progress in a similar way.
- Some information is collected about pupils' progress but the pupils are right in wanting to hear their own recordings more so 'we can hear what we have done and improve it more'.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- There are excellent musical opportunities for pupils in this school. All pupils in Year 3 learn to play a musical instrument and nearly two thirds continue after the year. The hope is that this percentage will continue in the upper school as the programme is repeated to more pupils. Currently around one fifth of pupils in Years 5 and 6 have additional instrumental lessons organised by the school.
- Class lessons are based on a published scheme which is generally adapted well to meet the needs of different classes. However, the school is aware of the need for further adaptation and development of this scheme to include clearer learning objectives and more detail about different expected responses.
- The curriculum is enhanced significantly through opportunities for pupils to experience different musical genres such as Gamelan, Steel Pan and Samba. It is also enriched through regular singing assemblies.
- Pupils have excellent opportunities to join in a range of extra-curricular activities, including a boys singing group, and perform to others.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are outstanding.

- Music is at the heart of this school. You have provided excellent leadership and are rightly proud of the benefits from music now being seen for all the children in the school. There is a real sense of togetherness and shared excitement from all staff, achieved in no small part by the involvement of all staff in the singing assemblies.
- The subject leader is outstanding. She brings considerable drive, energy and flair to the leadership and management of music. She is developing excellent systems to monitor work across the school through, for example, the increasing use of pupil recordings. The school is aware that this has some way to go yet but early signs indicate that these systems could be at the forefront of such developments across the country.
- Another strength of leadership and management is the constant self-evaluation that seeks to further improve provision. The provision is outstanding because of the quality of thinking that has identified what has needed most attention. The school recognises the next challenge is to develop deeper understanding of musical progression through, for example, using the increased pupils' recordings to develop portfolios for each year so that pupils and teachers have an even greater shared understanding of expectations.

Subject issues

Data Collection

- While this is at an early stage of development there are excellent emerging systems for collecting information on pupils' progress.

Partnership Links

- The links with the Music Service are excellent. The school works in close partnership with the instrumental specialists in the instrumental programme and benefits considerably from the high quality resources loaned to the school. These include instruments for the Year 3 programme and the sets of instruments for the enhanced curriculum programme.

Inclusion

- Considerable care is taken to ensure all pupils gain the maximum benefit from music. For example, the school has carefully analysed why boys did not join the choir and set up a boys singing group that only meets to prepare for concerts and rehearses after assembly. Particularly interesting is the way the boys are allowed to leave assembly first so they enjoy the status of belonging to the singing group.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- refining learning objectives so that pupils always know how to improve their work
- increasing information about pupils' musical progress through, for example, more use of pupils' recordings so that all pupils are given appropriate support and challenge
- using the recordings to develop understanding of musical progression.

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

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