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Mr D Pedley
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Dear Mr Pedley

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you very much for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on Thursday 14 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. 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 satisfactory with several good features, particularly in ensemble activities.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory, with some good aspects such as singing.

- Pupils join the school with standards that are broadly in line with national expectations. Good teaching and thorough planning mean that all children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, and they make good progress.

- During their time in Key Stage 2, children who perform in the choir and orchestra reach standards that are above national expectations. Pupils enjoy good achievement through their instrumental learning and through their participation in choir and orchestra. Singing is generally strong across the school. There is no doubt that these aspects of music provision have a very positive impact on the school community. However, some pupils do not gain the same benefits or enjoyment from the school's music provision. These pupils struggle to make progress because the work does not interest them or is too difficult.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with good features.

- The school employs specialist music teachers in both Key Stages 1 and 2. In all lessons, teachers model the work carefully so pupils can see and hear what is expected.
- There is good teaching throughout the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, characterised by a constant emphasis on the development of pupils' listening skills. Pupils are given the confidence to experiment and learn from their mistakes, and good routines are established with the care and use of instruments. Teaching assistants also provide good help in assessing the progress made by pupils.
- In Key Stage 2, students are taught to sing in two-parts, and there is appropriate attention to diction and expression. However, work is not always matched sufficiently to pupils' different learning needs (including the most able and those with learning difficulties), and so not all pupils make sufficient progress. Assessment is not used effectively to help plan lessons that focus on the full range of pupils' needs and interests.
- The heavy emphasis on performing from staff notation in Key Stage 2 also prevents some pupils from making as much progress as they should because they cannot interpret the notation quickly enough and are left behind. While teaching assistants try to help these pupils, the work set makes it hard for this help to be effective.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The overall quality of the curriculum and extra-curricular provision is satisfactory, with some good extra-curricular provision in Key Stage 2.

- In the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, there are appropriate schemes of work that ensure complete coverage of all curriculum requirements. These are based on published resources and are adapted well to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of pupils as appropriate.
- There are no extra-curricular activities in music for pupils in Key Stage 1. In Key Stage 2, there is a thriving choir and orchestra that both perform to a good standard. From Year 4 upwards, between a quarter and a third of all pupils participate in additional instrumental lessons in school.

- In contrast to these strengths, the Key Stage 2 planned scheme of work is sparse and does not give adequate coverage to the requirements of the National Curriculum. The majority of the planned curriculum for music lessons in Key Stage 2 is based on learning stave notation, learning to play the recorder and preparing songs for school productions. Whilst there are some other opportunities for pupils to participate in composing and listening work and use information technology for music, these are mostly through cross-curricular work with their class teachers. These creative opportunities are not planned or assessed within a systematic long-term curriculum strategy. Therefore, while the progress made by some pupils is good in performance skills, their composing, listening, and appraising skills are less well-developed and pupils' overall musical progress is much more limited. There is also limited cultural diversity in the music curriculum.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory.

- Music is led by two part time specialist music teachers, who are responsible for the planning and delivery of all class music lessons, the choir, the orchestra, and school productions. While there is good musical leadership and high expectations of musical standards in ensemble activities and performances, there is much less effective planning of the curriculum in Key Stage 2.
- The school clearly values the importance of music. You and the governing body have provided good instrumental resources and have increased the time available for the subject, particularly for ensemble activities. However, not as much attention has been given to developing and coordinating a music curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils. The school's self-evaluation correctly identifies the strengths of ensemble music-making and the high standards shown by the students who participate in instrumental music work. The school is also aware that the curriculum in Key Stage 2 needs further development.

Subject issues: Data collection and partnerships

- The local authority music service supplies instrumental teachers to the school, supplemented by one privately-employed brass teacher. The school is not currently involved in the local authority instrumental whole-class teaching programme, although a bid has been made to introduce whole-class brass teaching from September 2007.

Inclusion

- Music is inclusive in that there is curriculum provision for all. However, because so much of the Key Stage 2 classroom experience is focussed on stave-notation and recorder performance, pupils with other interests and abilities are not as well catered for.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the Key Stage 2 curriculum meets the full requirements of the National Curriculum, and that schemes of work and lessons are planned to take account of the learning needs and interests of all pupils
- making effective use of assessment, in Key Stage 2 to focus teaching on the skills, knowledge, and understanding that pupils need to develop to make musical progress.

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, 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

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools