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Mrs K Griffiths
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Griffiths

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 14 - 15 November 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: discussions with members of staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation including samples of pupils' work, and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. Lessons engage all pupils, regardless of their background and interests. As a result, pupils enjoy music and almost all make good progress, musically and personally. Although the school's designation as a music specialist school is very recent, music already plays an important part in the daily life of the school and makes a very positive contribution to its ethos.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Standards in Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with national expectations. Almost all pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points. A few do not consistently make enough progress either because the work is too easy or too difficult for them.
- Pupils listen carefully to analyse and evaluate what they hear. They successfully use what they learn in their own music making. This is especially evident in the 'Musical Futures' sessions which have been introduced this term. Pupils are already achieving well in these sessions.
- No teaching was observed in Key Stage 4. The number of pupils studying music in Year 10 is above average. Standards are high in the sample of pupils' work provided. Standards are also high in extra-curricular activities and pupils make good progress in rehearsals.
- Pupils enjoy their music making and have very positive attitudes to music. They collaborate very well with each other and take the lead in group work when appropriate. Pupils in Year 9 spoke very warmly about the subject. They appreciate the opportunities they have and the progress they are making in their work.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers' very strong subject knowledge encompasses a wide range of styles, genres and techniques from different cultures and traditions. Combined with a strong focus on practical music making and a positive ethos for learning, this plays an important part in engaging and motivating pupils. As a result, pupils are helped to be effective learners.
- In most cases, work is well matched to pupils' needs and they make good progress. However, opportunities to challenge higher attaining pupils or to support lower attaining pupils were not consistently planned or implemented sufficiently well.
- Lesson planning, while detailed and thoughtful, does not always identify learning objectives that are sufficiently precise to ensure that pupils understand what they are intended to learn, as opposed to do. Good feedback is given to pupils to help them improve their work, both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities. However, although pupils also evaluate their own work and suggest ways to improve, their responses sometimes lack precision because they are not clear about the focus of their learning.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The curriculum includes a good range of musical styles and genres with an emphasis on practical music making. Pupils say that the curriculum is up-to-date and relevant to them. Time allocations for music in Key Stage 3 are good and there is a good range of opportunities available, including, for example, the 'Musical Futures' modules and sessions focusing on music technology. Some pupils in Year 9 have begun their Key Stage 4 music courses as an additional activity beyond the time-tabled day.
- All pupils in Year 7 have a singing lesson each week and they are beginning to develop confidence in singing. The department recognises that there are insufficient opportunities for singing in Years 8 and 9.
- Pupils in Key Stage 4 are able to choose from a very good range of music options. These match their needs and interests very well. There is also a good range of extra-curricular activities drawn from different styles and genres. The well chosen repertoire engages and motivates pupils.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- The school has a very good understanding of the importance of music and its role in the school, allied to a clear vision for future development. Following its recent designation as a music specialist school the newly established music team has already made significant progress in implementing this vision. The actions taken to date provide good examples of strong capacity for improvement.
- Self-evaluation demonstrates good understanding of the school's musical strengths and weaknesses. The importance of meeting the needs and interests of all pupils is paramount in the department's planning.
- Areas for development now include the more precise identification of what pupils are intended to learn in lessons; the way in which pupils' work is assessed against national curriculum levels and how this information is used to plan work that allows all pupils to make good progress.

Subject issues

Data Collection

- Little information is provided by most feeder schools on standards in music. The department uses the initial modules in Year 7 to help to assess pupils' standards. Information about pupils' involvement in instrumental lessons is shared with the school by the local authority music service.
- As pupils progress through the school their attainment against National Curriculum levels is regularly assessed and recorded. Assessment criteria do not give sufficient emphasis to the key learning defined in the first sentence of each National Curriculum level. Opportunities to assess progression within each level, in terms of pupils' increasing confidence, independence and ownership, as suggested in the national curriculum document for music, are also being missed.

Partnership Links

- The school has strong links with the local authority music service. The school provides a base for ensemble rehearsals and is collaborating with the service in introducing instrumental activities to whole classes in Year 7.
- Good links are being established with other schools. For example, five primary schools were identified as partners in the school's successful bid for specialist status. The support being provided includes the provision of specialist music teaching. Pupils from a nearby special school receive their music lessons in this school. Plans are in place for the school to provide the local authority music teaching in the sixth form.

Inclusion

- The school provides very well for its pupils in music. Initiatives such as 'Musical Futures' and curricular options for music in Key Stage 4 demonstrate an awareness of the need to ensure that all pupils are well catered for. The broad range of extra curricular activities also provides activities for pupils with differing interests and abilities.
- Music has successfully engaged some potentially disaffected pupils. Many pupils with learning difficulties are strategically supported through their involvement in vocal and instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- identifying more clearly and precisely what pupils are intended to learn, as opposed to do, in lessons
- identifying learning outcomes for pupils of differing levels of attainment more consistently to ensure that all pupils make good progress
- placing greater emphasis on the significance of the key characteristic of learning in the first sentence of each National Curriculum level when planning and assessing learning.

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

David Williams
Additional Inspector