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Mr C Bromley
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Dear Mr Bromley

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 28-29 January 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, governors and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation and observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. The school provides a practical approach to learning in music which is based on a varied and relevant curriculum. Pupils enjoy their practical work and are well motivated. The school is well placed to ensure that the recent effective changes to provision are developed further so that there is a greater emphasis on developing pupils' critical listening and expressive responses to music.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards both on entry to the school and by the end of Year 8 are in line with national expectations. Pupils have positive attitudes, enjoy their music making and make satisfactory progress. They particularly appreciate the practical work undertaken.
- As they progress through the school, pupils develop satisfactory skills in singing and in playing a range of acoustic and electronic instruments. However, in some lessons a few pupils are not able to achieve as well as they should because the activities are too difficult for them.
- Pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) well to develop their musical understanding, for example, creating pieces to explore common structures used in contemporary popular music.
- About a third of pupils learn musical instruments in school and beyond. A much smaller proportion of pupils takes part in extra-curricular activities.

Quality of teaching and learning

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

- Relationships between teachers and pupils are good and there is a positive ethos for learning. Most pupils are engaged by the active approach to music making and take part enthusiastically in a good range of activities. Planning identifies what pupils are intended to learn and rightly distinguishes between this and the activities to be undertaken to support this learning. However, work is not always modified sufficiently to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. As a result some pupils did not achieve as well as might be expected.
- Teachers generally make good use of ICT although it is used less effectively when focused too much on developing score writing skills.
- Helpful verbal feedback is given to support pupils and to help them to know how to improve their work. However, insufficient emphasis is given to developing pupils' critical listening skills and to improving the quality of their music making, both through on-going assessment and the overall expectations of pupils' achievements.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The music curriculum is well balanced and includes a good range of music from different countries and in different styles and genres. The overall content is appropriate to pupils' musical interests but it is not always adapted sufficiently to meet the learning needs of all pupils.

- Active and practical learning is a strength of the curriculum. Pupils in Year 8 said that they were now enjoying their music lessons much more than when they entered the school because of the recent emphasis on practical activities.
- There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities and good opportunities for instrumental tuition. The range of extra-curricular activities does not currently provide on-going weekly activities such as samba or African drumming, although these are included as units of study within the class curriculum. Pupils in Year 8 thought that these would be valuable, not only for the music opportunities they would provide, but also to further develop their understanding of different cultures.
- Other opportunities for curriculum extension are provided during the year. For example, during the school's music week, to which pupils from other schools are invited, Gamelan workshops will be provided by external specialists.
- The accommodation for music lacks sufficient small spaces for group work. When pupils work in groups the level of sound contributes to the difficulty pupils experience in listening carefully. This limits the extent to which they can improve and refine the quality and expressive nature of their music making.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory.

- The school has a clear vision for music and good progress has been made recently. During the last two years, since the appointment of the subject leader, the curriculum for music has become more practically-based. Pupils in Year 8 spoke positively about the differences that have been seen in their lessons during this time.
- There is a clear understanding of the need to build on this improvement. The school has good plans to develop a more creative and independent approach to learning in music, to improve the quality of singing and further enhance extra-curricular provision to engage a wider range of pupils.
- The subject leader is fully aware of current national initiatives and uses these well, for example to inform developments in the curriculum. The school is well placed to ensure that the recent effective changes to provision are developed further to ensure that there is a greater emphasis on developing pupils' critical listening and expressive responses to music.

Subject issue: Partnership Links

- The school has good links with the Local Authority music service. In addition to providing instrumental lessons the service collaborates with the school in running extra-curricular activities for instrumental pupils. The school has also developed helpful links with other agencies to enhance provision for pupils. The school recognises that it could develop further

links with partner schools and local musicians in order to extend opportunities and the quality of provision for pupils.

Inclusion

- The school has focused its recent developments in music to ensure that all pupils benefit from its provision. It has largely achieved this aim although it recognises that further developments are needed, for example, in providing for gifted and talented musicians.
- Information about pupils' achievements and interests in music is collected when they enter the school. On-going information about their achievements as they progress through the school is regularly collected and recorded. This information is not, however, used systematically to help match work to the differing needs of all pupils.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that greater emphasis is given to developing pupils' critical listening skills and the expressive quality of their music making
- using information about pupils' achievements, including that collected through on-going assessment, more effectively to ensure that work is adapted to meet the needs of all pupils
- extending extra-curricular provision through providing a wider range of opportunities to engage more pupils in ways that match their needs and interests.

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