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Mrs E Donnelly  
Headteacher  
St Joseph's RC School  
Prince Consort Road  
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NE8 1LR

Dear Mrs Donnelly

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 21 May 2008. 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 any links you have developed with other schools and agencies.

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 and observation of lessons, a choir practice and an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. The school takes every opportunity to involve all pupils in a wide variety of music styles. This contributes significantly to their personal and social development. The importance the school gives to music is rightfully recognised in the Artsmark Silver award.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are good.

- Standards overall are broadly in line with national expectations and pupils' achievement is good given their attainment when they join the school. The quality of singing, especially from the members of the choir, is above that expected nationally. Singing is fun and pupils are familiar with a variety of singing games and other 'warm up' activities. They display a good understanding of phrasing and diction. They respond well to directions given by their teachers.
- Children in the Foundation Stage enjoy a range of music activities including exploring computer programs. These help them recognise different instruments and put different sounds together.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2 perform accurately in groups, following either music notation or symbols. They listen carefully to each other and successfully maintain different rhythmic patterns. However, their musical creativity is less developed.
- As a result of the careful targeting of boys through the 'breakthrough project', interest and involvement, especially by older boys, in the choir has considerably increased. This reflects the school's aim that music provision is for all.
- The school collects information about pupils' musical interests and involvement in instrumental lessons. However the information about their progress is less well established.
- Pupils' behaviour in music lessons is exemplary. They cooperate well with each other and are considerate when offering suggestions for improvements to their peers. Although pupils are keen and many are able to take the lead in performance work, they would benefit from more opportunities to do this in lessons.

## Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Lessons are planned well and learning is made fun. In most lessons teachers provide a good level of challenge for all pupils. In a recorder lesson for Year 3, more able pupils successfully played more complex pieces to accompany the rest of the class. Occasionally, however, too much emphasis is placed on completing the activity and insufficient attention is given to the development of pupils' musical skills.
- Pupils want to do their best. Relationships are positive and all pupils' work and performances are valued. Good learning is generally achieved through opportunities for pupils to reflect and evaluate their work, although this could be used even more consistently across all lessons.
- Questioning is used well and pupils are helped to express their opinions and describe their work with confidence.

## Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- Learning is considerably enhanced by a good range of whole school events and after school clubs linked both to music and other art forms. These events introduce pupils to a broad range of musical styles and provide opportunities for them to perform in a range of venues. Year 6 pupils talked enthusiastically about singing traditional songs during the recent citizenship ceremony held at the Civic Centre. These activities contribute very well to pupils' personal and social development.
- The school has arranged for all Year 3 pupils to learn the recorder in addition to their normal class music lesson.
- The school recognises that the current curriculum needs modification to ensure the development of pupils' musical skills and to encourage pupils' creative development through more composition work. Work is already in hand to make these improvements.
- Boys and girls are equally involved in the school choir and they attend regularly.

## Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- Music has a high profile within the school and staff share your enthusiasm and interest in the subject. The school benefits from having an energetic and well informed subject leader whose leadership and strategic role is developing successfully under your direction. Support and guidance for less experienced colleagues is well timed.
- Some monitoring of provision and tracking of progress is undertaken, however this is often on an informal basis. The school is working to refine and standardise the way all teachers assess pupils' work in order to identify their musical ability and track individual progress.
- Events are specially planned and chosen to extend pupils' understanding of, and involvement in, different styles of music. They are also given many opportunities to perform to others. The regular productions are very much valued and enjoyed by both adults and pupils alike.

Subject issues:

## Partnership Links

- There are some links with the local secondary school and more extended links with other primary schools where pupils take part in a variety of arts activities. However curriculum links are less well developed.

- The school has strong links with the Parish and the local community. The Christian ethos is an important part of school life, but music and traditions from other faiths are also explored.
- At present the school has no involvement in the instrumental and/or vocal programmes funded by the Government.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- adapting the scheme of work to ensure pupil's musical skills are developed systematically
- providing more regular opportunities for pupils to compose their own music
- refining and standardising the way information about pupil's musical progress is collected and recorded.

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

Marianne Young  
Her Majesty's Inspector