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Mrs R Brownhill
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Brownhill

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 15 July 2008. I would be grateful if you also could pass my thanks to the pupils who met with me at lunchtime, and the Chair of Governors, for their time during the day.

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.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. This is because teaching, the curriculum, and extra-curricular activities do not provide sufficient challenge and, as a result, pupils make inadequate progress in music during their time at the school.

Achievement and Standards

Achievement and standards are inadequate overall.

- By the end of the Foundation Stage, children's musical development is in line with national expectations. They readily share their observations and opinions about music, sing with enthusiasm, and show a developing sense of pulse and rhythm.
- Standards in singing remain broadly average at the end of Key Stage 2. Pupils sing confidently, including in two and three-part rounds, but they are right to say that the choice of songs could be more interesting and challenging. Standards are well below average in playing instruments and in creating musical ideas and pupils make inadequate progress in these important areas of their work.
- Only eight pupils receive additional instrumental tuition, all on brass instruments. Their standards of playing are relatively weak given the length of time they have been playing. Although all pupils participate vocally in the various festival celebrations and weekly worship events, there is not a school choir or any instrumental group to extend pupils' ensemble skills.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is inadequate.

- In the Foundation Stage, children learn to explore sounds and respond thoughtfully when listening to music, although teacher-led songs are sometimes pitched too low to suit the children's voices. In a Key Stage 1 class, pupils made outstanding progress in their rhythmic development and musical understanding through dance and movement; pupils were totally engaged in musical activity throughout this fast-paced lesson. There were high expectations both for the standard of dance and the standard of musicality that pupils could achieve.
- Teachers are always professional and detailed in their lesson planning, and working relationships in all classrooms are good. However in too many lessons, particularly in Key Stage 2, pupils make inadequate progress. Too often, lessons are planned around the completion of an activity rather than an understanding of the specific musical skills, knowledge, and understanding that pupils need to develop, and expectations for the quality of pupils' work are too low. Too much time is spent by the teacher talking and explaining, rather than modelling music. Sometimes, tasks are too complex and, occasionally, teachers' weak subject understanding leads to confusion, and basic musical skills are not taught correctly.
- Whilst individual teachers keep some records of pupils' work, there is not a systematic assessment scheme. As a result, assessment is not used meaningfully to inform teachers' planning or ensure all pupils are making progress.
- Teachers make sure that every pupil is included in lesson activities. However, there is often insufficient difference in teachers' expectations of what the more able pupils could achieve, and too often pupils who find learning difficult are expected to complete the same activities, at the same speed, as the rest of the class.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- There is an outline, long-term programme for the music curriculum which is based on a published scheme of work. Other published materials are used to provide additional teaching resources. Whilst long-term planning ensures adequate coverage of all National Curriculum requirements, there is insufficient consideration of the musical skills, knowledge, and understanding that pupils will progressively acquire by the end of Year 6. The scheme of work does not set high enough expectations for the quality of pupils' work.
- The school's music policy states that music is taught in a variety of ways, including workshops and weekly music sessions but pupils say that they do not always have regular music lessons, particularly in the later years of Key Stage 2. However, they enjoyed the greatly increased time given to music over the last two weeks.
- Whilst there are brass lessons available for a limited number of pupils, there are no other opportunities for pupils to gain additional instrumental skills. The school does not participate in the local authority's whole-class instrumental teaching programme. There are no ensemble vocal or instrumental activities.

Leadership and management of music

The overall quality of leadership and management is inadequate.

- Whilst the broad curriculum plan, whole-school singing, occasional workshops and links with the high school provide a basic framework for musical experiences, these activities are not sufficiently monitored or coordinated to ensure that provision enables pupils to make at least satisfactory progress overall during their time at the school. Pupils' progress is not effectively assessed and monitored, so the school does not offer sufficient musical challenge or support where it is needed.
- The school is not involved with any national initiatives such as the whole-class instrumental teaching programme, the national singing initiative, or the programme of professional development for teachers.
- The school has given insufficient attention to the development of music. However, there is clear understanding of the important contribution that music can make to the whole school. The school is right to look for ways to work in partnership with the local authority and others to improve provision for pupils.

Subject issues: Data collection and partnerships

- The Music Service provides the brass lessons and an annual demonstration concert by instrumental teachers. There are established links with the local high school to provide occasional workshops or to borrow instruments. There are also occasional performances from visiting musicians. Whilst all these are of some benefit to pupils, they are not enough to cover other shortfalls in music provision.
- The school could not provide data detailing participation in musical activities or levels of pupils' attainment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed and agreed, included:

- raising teachers' expectations about the musical standards that pupils can achieve
- providing a regular programme of curricular and extra-curricular music that provides ongoing opportunities for all pupils to progressively develop their skills and understanding in all areas of musical experience
- ensuring that information about pupils' progress is collected and used to help teachers plan lessons that challenge pupils of all interests and abilities.

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