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Mrs T Brunton
Headteacher
St Mary's Church of England VA Junior School
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Dear Mrs Brunton

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 17 June 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 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 outstanding. Pupils benefit from high quality teaching and an excellent curriculum. Every pupil feels involved and included and there are high levels of participation in the choirs and ensembles.

Achievement and Standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- All pupils make at least good progress throughout Key Stage 2. High expectations and inclusive teaching help all pupils reach standards that are well above average. Many pupils achieve exceptionally high standards particularly in singing and playing instruments.
- Over 40% of all students are learning to play a musical instrument. Large numbers of pupils also participate in the school choirs and instrumental ensembles. All groups of pupils are well-represented in these activities. The school is using the wider opportunities programme to improve participation and inclusion even more, by focussing on musical styles and interests that were not provided previously.
- Participation in musical activities does much to help the outstanding personal development of many pupils. Increased confidence and self-esteem is being promoted alongside equally rigorous development of pupils' musical skills and knowledge.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Most lessons are taught by the specialist music teacher and pupils benefit greatly from her outstanding subject knowledge and understanding. Other lessons are taken by class teachers who also have good musical skills. This depth of musical experience and confidence amongst your staff, combined with some outstanding generic teaching skills, is outstanding.
- Working relationships are excellent. Pupils have great respect for their teachers and behaviour is consistently very good.
- Lessons are prepared thoroughly and are consistently focussed on pupils' musical development, in particularly their listening skills. Teachers and pupils use musical vocabulary fluently and relevantly.
- The most able pupils are clearly identified and work for them is challenging, although they do not always make full use of their specialist instrumental skills in class lessons. Vulnerable pupils are well supported by teaching assistants, many of whom having high-level musical skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils make good progress in their instrumental lessons although more modelling by the teachers would have helped increased pupils' understanding of how they could improve their work.
- High quality recordings are made of pupils' work. These are used well to help teachers assess pupils' responses and plan the next stages of their learning. Assessment processes are uncomplicated but effective because they take into account all aspects of the pupil's musical development, rather than assessing isolated individual components.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The music curriculum has been developed over many years, drawing on a variety of models and published resources. It is closely tailored to pupils' needs, interests and abilities. There is constant revision of curriculum plans to reflect new ideas and approaches.
- There is outstanding breadth. The school has a long tradition of strength in western art music styles and this has been extended to include pop and rock instrumental teaching. This has enabled an even greater range of pupils to become actively involved in music.
- Extra-curricular ensembles complement pupils' learning in class and in additional instrumental lessons. There is a thriving school choir, and an orchestra of over 50 players. The boys' choir also has over 50 members and is making great progress, both in developing the boys' musical skills and in promoting their confidence, self-esteem, and enjoyment. There are many other smaller ensembles, including recorders, brass, and handbells.

Leadership and management of music

The overall quality of leadership and management is outstanding.

- You and your music coordinator have an outstanding vision for music at St Mary's, with high expectations for participation, inclusion, and standards. Complementing this leadership is a remarkable depth of support from teaching staff and other adults in the school. Music plays a central role in the school's success, and the school's mission statement of "excellence accompanied by laughter" is shown clearly through the standards and enjoyment achieved by pupils in music.
- Even with this success the school is not complacent. Music provision is constantly evaluated and new developments introduced to ensure that all are included and can achieve – for example, the boys' choir and the wider opportunities programme.

Subject issues: Data collection and partnerships

- The school has a very good relationship with the local authority Music Service to provide a wide range of instrumental lessons and the wider opportunities programme. However, links with the local high schools are not so well-developed.
- There are very good relationships with other primary schools. The school is involved in the annual primary schools' music festival and gives support to schools where music is less well-developed. There is also a very good partnership with the Basingstoke Male Voice Choir, which shares public

performances. This partnership is having a positive impact on the development of the boys' choir.

- Assessment is a well-developed feature of the music curriculum; pupils' work is effectively related to National Curriculum levels.

Subject issues: Inclusion

- Inclusion is outstanding in all respects.

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

- sharing outstanding classroom practice with instrumental teachers, particularly in the effective use of modelling as a teaching and learning tool
- sharing the school's outstanding provision with partner secondary schools to support pupils' continued progress beyond Key Stage 2.

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