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Mrs M Gale  
Headteacher  
St. Michael's CE (VC) First School  
Weaver's Lane  
Stone  
Staffordshire  
ST15 8QB

Dear Mrs Gale

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in Music

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 16 July 2008 to look at work in music. I would be grateful if you could also pass my thanks to the parents, grandparents, and governors who gave their time to sing with the community choir or accompany the children's singing, and to the pupils who met with me at lunchtime.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: discussions with members of staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, observation of whole class singing, choir rehearsals and some lessons were also observed.

Features of good practice observed

- Children throughout the school sing with enthusiasm and much enjoyment. They show good intonation and good expression. Diction is good, and tone is sustained well, particularly through long notes and phrases. Older children are learning to hold independent melodies through singing three matching songs at the same time, although other part-singing is less well-developed.

- The deputy headteacher leads the school's singing work with an infectious enthusiasm that encourages pupils to sing confidently. This positive approach is complemented by confident leadership and modelling of singing by yourself and other members of staff. Songs are always pitched correctly to suit the ranges of children's voices.
- The large school choir is enhanced by performances with the Parents and Friends' Choir, which meets every week. In addition to promoting a good standard of singing, these activities do much to enhance the school's sense of community. However, boys are significantly underrepresented in the choir and ensuring their greater involvement in vocal work is a key area for future development.
- You have carefully considered how singing can help all aspects of children's development, including their health and feeling safe, their enjoyment and achievement in all aspects of their school work, and their future lives as confident learners.
- Every opportunity is embraced to celebrate and enhance the pupils' musical experiences and development. "Sing Up", the national singing initiative, has recognised the amount of vocal work that you have provided in your school over many years.
- Over the past year, all 70 Year 3 pupils have also participated in the whole-class string instrumental teaching programme. In September, the new Year 3 will start the programme and 24 Year 4 pupils will continue with violin or 'cello tuition. All this tuition is provided at no cost to parents but this means that the number of pupils who are able to continue learning is restricted. Your music self-evaluation rightly prioritises the need for you to review the progress made by pupils over the year in the whole class instrumental programme.

#### Areas for development

As we discussed, provision in the school could be further improved by:

- ensuring greater inclusion in vocal work, particularly by significantly increasing the number of boys who sing in the school choir or other vocal ensembles
- reviewing the first year of the whole-class instrumental teaching programme, particularly the progress made by pupils during this year and the opportunities for pupils to continue with instrumental tuition in subsequent years.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in the school.

As I explained previously, 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.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips  
Her Majesty's Inspector