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Mr K Gordon
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Gordon

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 18 September 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, observation of lessons and a hymn practice for Key Stage 2 pupils.

The overall effectiveness of music is good. Many pupils are involved in different productions and performances. These help to broaden their musical horizons and raise their ambitions so that they very much enjoy performing and being involved in music.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are good.

- Children in the Foundation Stage like their regular music lessons where they use a variety of instruments, recognise how sounds are put together and learn to follow music instructions.
- Overall, pupils attain broadly in line with national expectations by the end of Year 6. They make good progress given their limited experience of music before they start school. Pupils enjoy their music lessons and co-operate well together sharing ideas and suggestions about how to improve or develop their compositions.
- Singing is developed well as a regular part of music lessons and in the weekly hymn practice. For example, in one lesson, pupils in Year 6 sang a two-part song with confidence, clarity of diction and awareness of pitch with a few individuals helping their peers to keep time accurately. However during whole school singing, progress is not always as rapid because pupils do not practice the different parts that they find difficult.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Progress is good when teaching challenges and enables the pupils to develop their musical skills systematically. For example, pupils wanted to use short musical phrases to accompany their songs. They experimented with different sounds, hummed notes to each other and successfully came up with the best notes.
- However progress is slower when work is not adapted to meet pupils' different needs. This tends to occur when teachers are less confident to move away from the prescribed curriculum and, as a result, pupils' find tasks either too easy or too difficult.
- Assessment in these lessons is often based on whether or not an activity is completed rather than what specific skills, knowledge and understanding have been learned.
- Pupils work well together; are eager to learn from their mistakes and have confidence to express their opinions about each others' work.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The school is aware that the current curriculum, which is based on a published scheme, meets requirements but does not always meet the learning needs of all pupils.
- The ambitious annual productions, which involve all children, help to raise their aspirations and give them confidence to perform in public.

Pupils talked enthusiastically about how past pupils had gone on to star in West End productions. These productions and concerts bring the school and the local community together and provide a very good opportunity to share in and recognise others' successes.

- A small number of pupils receive instrumental lessons and the school is giving good attention to finding ways to increase this number.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good.

- Music is seen as an important part of the school curriculum and senior leaders provide good support for additional opportunities. An increasing number of parents are attending the regular concerts and welcome the opportunities for their children to be involved in the different musical events.
- Monitoring takes place regularly and the development plan identifies clearly what is needed to improve provision further. The school is making effective use of some of the national initiatives for music. For example, some teachers are successfully using material from the 'Sing Up' programme which gives them suggestions when teaching singing to their pupils.
- While some records are kept of the progress made by pupils, the school is aware that this system needs to be refined further so that clear information about the progress being made can be used effectively to plan work that meets the needs of all the pupils.

Subject issues:

Partnership Links

- The school hopes to be involved in the instrumental programme, funded by the government, next year. They are using the funding received so far to purchase instruments for the school.
- There are no links with local secondary schools.

Inclusion

- The school makes every effort to involve all pupils in concerts, workshops and other musical events both within school and in the city. At present only a few pupils have lessons either in school or at home, so the school is rightfully exploring ways to introduce whole class tuition.
- The school is considering an innovative scheme to involve more boys in the choir.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the quality of whole school singing by giving the same attention to the development of singing skills as seen in lessons
- refining and developing the scheme of work to better meet the needs of all pupils
- making sure that assessment focuses on the development of pupils' musical skills, knowledge and understanding.

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