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Mrs M Dodge
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dodge

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 05 February 2009. 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 class lessons, and a Foundation Stage/Key Stage 1 singing assembly.

The overall effectiveness of music is good, with some outstanding features.

There is an excellent ambition for music, and the school has invested well to provide an outstanding range of curriculum opportunities for pupils. There are strong links with the local authority music service, particularly through the wider opportunities brass lessons. This programme has helped older pupils make very good progress in their musical development, and has also helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning in other areas of the school's work. However, some lessons, particularly in Key Stage 2, place too much emphasis on the acquisition and interpretation of notation at the expense of developing pupils' aural and musical responses.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are good, with some outstanding features.

- When they start school, children's musical development is in line with age-related expectations. They have a repertoire of familiar songs and they particularly enjoy putting actions with their singing. By the end of Key Stage 2, standards are above average, and this represents good progress overall.
- Pupils make their best progress in playing instruments, particularly through the wider opportunities programme. Progress in singing is good, but is not yet outstanding because there are not enough opportunities for older pupils to develop singing in parts. Pupils have opportunities to develop their creative skills, but these skills are less developed than their performing skills.
- An outstanding feature is the very high proportion of pupils involved in additional instrumental tuition and extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, all groups of pupils are well-represented, including a good number of boys in the school choir. Music does much to help pupils' personal development and self-esteem, including those who find learning difficult.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to music are outstanding. They are co-operative, and eager to participate and do well.
- Teachers have very good musical skills and are confident performers. Lessons always include practical musical activity. In the most effective lessons, there is a sustained focus on pupils' aural development. For example, in one lesson observed, the teacher led pupils through rhythm games, call-and-response singing exercises, and then taught them to play a melody on the recorder. Musical notation was skilfully introduced to pupils as a natural extension of these activities. Consequently, all pupils made excellent progress in their musical development. However, in contrast there are also lessons where pupils' musical participation is heavily dependent on their ability to read written notation, and consequently some pupils struggle to make progress in these sessions.
- Although it is clear that pupils make good musical progress overall, there is little formal assessment made of pupils' musical development. Audio recordings, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT), are rarely made of pupils' work. As a result, there is insufficient formal tracking of pupils' musical development and pupils do not always know how well they are achieving in music.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- Pupils are offered a wide range of musical opportunities. Every pupil benefits from a weekly class music lesson, a singing session, and opportunities to learn instrumental skills. There is a thriving school choir, a recorder group, guitar club, and percussion band.

- There is a detailed scheme of work to support class music lessons, which ensures a good breadth and depth in the curriculum. However, whilst this scheme has been used effectively for many years, it does not incorporate the work that is done in the wider opportunities programme.
- There are very good resources for teaching and learning music, including a full range of classroom instruments. The school has invested in a full class set of brass instruments to support the wider opportunities programme, and this means that every pupil is able to take an instrument home to practice in-between lessons.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are good, with some outstanding features.

- There is excellent commitment to music through the engagement of teachers with specialist music skills, purchase of instruments, and good allocation of curriculum time. In preparation for this inspection, you took the innovative step of surveying parents for their views about the quality of music in the school. Parents are, quite rightly extremely positive about the musical opportunities that are provided for their children. One parent said "it is wonderful how learning to play an instrument or sing is seen as a normal part of the school experience, rather than something only a few children do".
- Self-evaluation of music is excellent. The teaching of music co-ordinator, who took responsibility for leading the subject in September 2008, has benefited greatly from his involvement with the wider opportunities project. You recognise that there now needs to be more effective monitoring of teaching and learning across the school, to ensure that good practice is understood and applied by all teachers.
- There are some parents who would like to be kept better informed about their child's musical activities and progress, and this supports the need for the school to improve the way that pupils' musical progress is assessed.

Subject Issues

Partnership Links

- The school's partnership with the local authority music service through the wider opportunities programme has brought excellent benefits to pupils and staff. However, partnerships with the partner secondary school are not as well developed.

Inclusion

- The school makes outstanding efforts to ensure that every pupil is able to access opportunities in music. The school keeps detailed attendance registers for musical groups and knows that all groups are represented in these activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the best teaching practice, which has pupils' aural development at the heart of practical music-making, is evident in all class music lessons
- improving teachers' assessment of pupils' musical development, including better use of recordings of pupils' work
- building links with the partner secondary school to ensure that pupils' good progress in Key Stage 2, particularly in their instrumental work, is continued into Key Stage 3.

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

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector