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Mr G Tharia
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Dear Mr Tharia

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit from mid-day on 27 April to mid-day on 28 April 2009. At the end of the inspection I fed back my judgements and this letter is to confirm my findings.

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 and instrumental lessons, visits to the choir and orchestra rehearsals, and a singing assembly.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory with some particularly good features.

Musical activities have a high profile at Elmbridge. There is a good range of instrumental lessons and performance groups on offer, and these are enjoyed by pupils. Teachers work hard to plan well-organised lessons. However, pupils make satisfactory progress because of there is limited focus on the quality of their musical responses.

Achievement and standards

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

- In Year 3, pupils show average musical ability, singing enthusiastically with a secure sense of pulse and rhythm. By Year 6, some make good progress to reach above-average standards, particularly through playing instruments. The personal development of these students also benefits very well from their participation in musical activities. However progress in class music lessons, the main musical experience for the majority of pupils, is only satisfactory because there is not enough focus on their musical participation and development.
- Similarly, whilst the school choir is popular and much enjoyed by participating pupils, progress in singing is satisfactory because not enough attention is given in class lessons and in whole-school singing to improving the quality of pupils' responses and developing good singing techniques including, for older pupils, learning how to sing different parts in the same song.
- Overall, a good number of pupils participate in additional lessons and extra-curricular activities, although girls heavily outnumber boys, particularly in the choir. Developing boys' singing is an important area for further improvement. A small but enthusiastic group of pupils attend the recently formed 'Rock School'. The wider opportunities programme has enabled all students in the school to have a short experience of learning an instrument. However, learning from these sessions has not been effectively consolidated because the programmes are not integrated into the school's curriculum planning and pupils' learning is not built upon. The number of pupils continuing with tuition as a result of the initial wider opportunities experience is low.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers are diligent and work hard to plan well organised activities for their lessons. Pupils respond positively, and working relationships in class are good.
- A good number of teachers are musically skilled and are confident performers. However, in many lessons, they do not use these skills effectively to model and lead pupils. Too much time is spent explaining, rather than modelling and leading music-making. As a result, pupils spend too much time listening to their teachers talking, and limited time actively performing and listening to music in class. This was also the case in instrumental lessons observed, where

teachers did not make enough use of musical demonstration to develop pupils' listening skills or show them how to improve their playing, preferring instead to use words to explain and describe the musical skills to be learnt.

- Teaching assistants provide good general support for pupils with learning difficulties but offer much less musical help. Lesson planning does not recognise the learning needs of these students or seek opportunities to recognise and build on the skills of those with additional instrumental skills.
- Very little use is made of information and communications technology (ICT), either for creating music or for recording pupils' work. The school recognises that this is an area for further improvement.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The scheme of work ensures that, overall, there is appropriate depth and breadth in the curriculum. Published resources are used by all year groups. These are adapted appropriately to meet teachers' varying needs, but are not sufficiently developed to recognise the additional needs of students who find learning difficult or who are more able musically.
- There is a good range of instrumental lessons on offer, and a good range of ensemble opportunities, including the school choir, orchestra, recorder group, guitar club, and 'Rock School'. There is a good level of staff involvement in these activities including class teachers and the special needs co-ordinator, who makes a particularly valuable contribution by accompanying instrumental and vocal ensembles.
- There are very good resources for teaching music, including a full range of classroom percussion, keyboards, and a dedicated music room.

Leadership and management of music

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

- There is a good commitment to music by senior management, recognising the benefits of music to individual pupils and the whole school community. Instrumental tuition and extra-curricular activities are well-organised, and resources are very good.
- The subject co-ordinator has been in post since September 2008, and has a good understanding of the school's musical strengths and weaknesses. She is given good support and encouragement by senior leaders. While there has been some monitoring of provision, the current arrangement of class teachers responsible for the curriculum in Years 3 and 4, and visiting specialist teachers responsible for Years 5

and 6, this has had limited impact because there has been insufficient opportunity to develop a common understanding of what represents effective teaching and learning in music.

Subject Issues

Partnership Links

- A strong partnership with the local authority music service is well-established to provide instrumental tuition. The school also brings in visiting musicians to provide 'one-off', high profile workshops and performances, which are much enjoyed by pupils. However, like the wider opportunities programme, the long-term benefit of these on the number and range of pupils regularly participating in musical activities is limited.

Inclusion

- The school makes effective efforts to ensure that every pupil is able to access additional opportunities in music, and all groups are represented in instrumental tuition and ensemble activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that all teaching has a clear focus on pupils' musical engagement and development, with greater emphasis on teachers' musical leadership alongside verbal explanations
- ensuring that planning includes high expectations for pupils' musical standards as well as their participation in activities
- ensuring that pupils who receive additional tuition are able to use and build on their instrumental skills in class music lessons
- increasing boys' participation in all vocal activities.

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