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Ms N Cottier
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Cottier

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 23 June 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 and recordings, observation of class and instrumental lessons, visits to choir rehearsals, and a Key Stage 2 singing assembly.

The overall effectiveness of music at St. Matthew's is outstanding. There is a constant focus on, and expectation for, high standards of music making. Music teaching throughout the school is characterised by excellent modelling and the detailed attention given to the quality of pupils' musical responses. There is also a deep commitment to inclusion, realised in excellent representation for all groups in musical activities. Whilst music plays a valuable role in cross-curricular working with other subjects, outstanding

leadership has rightly prioritised high quality, discrete subject provision as the foundation for securing pupils' musical skills and understanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are outstanding.

- Children start school with low levels of creative experience. They are starting to join in rhymes and songs, and show interest in the way that instruments sound, but their musical development is less advanced than that expected for their ages.
- During their time in the school, pupils make outstanding progress overall. Standards in singing are exceptional. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils sing confidently in two and three parts with excellent intonation, expression and diction. This is particularly impressive as the majority of pupils are at the early stages of learning English. Singing also develops pupils' good musical understanding and this provides them with a solid foundation for future participation. Standards in playing instruments are broadly average, representing good progress given pupils' starting points.
- A good proportion of pupils participate in additional lessons and extra-curricular activities. What is extraordinary about these participation rates is the way that all groups of pupils are included, regardless of age, gender, ability, or background. Boys are well represented in the choirs, and every boy in Year 6 is a member of the djembe drumming group. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are also well-represented in ensembles and instrumental tuition.
- Music plays an outstanding role in pupils' personal development. The many opportunities that they have to perform in public and at prestigious venues give them an excellent sense of self-worth and help to increase their understanding of the society in which they live.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teachers have excellent personal music skills. Many of the teaching staff hold musical qualifications or are themselves practising musicians. They model confidently and expertly, and this inspires pupils to aim for high standards of performance.
- In ensemble rehearsals and in class music lessons, there is a relentless focus on music making. Learning objectives have a clear focus on the quality of musical understanding. Pupils enjoy participating but also understand that, in order to improve, this challenge is necessary. One pupil commented, 'music lessons are fun, but my teacher can be strict as well because we need that to get better'.

- Ongoing assessment during class lessons is effective because teachers listen carefully and constantly to the quality of pupils' responses, and improve performance by challenging and modelling good practice. Pupils' overall musical progress is considered well because teachers assess their holistic progress across all areas of musical experience, rather than trying to test individual elements or activities. Audio and video recordings are made of pupils' performances, particularly at the conclusion of projects or events. Whilst pupils have some opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) to create music, more use could be made of ICT to help pupils listen to and evaluate their work.
- Additional instrumental teaching also sets high expectations but pupils make less progress in these experiences than they do in singing or in class music lessons because there is too much emphasis on the acquisition of notation skills, particularly for those in the early stages of learning. For many pupils, particularly those who find other aspects of learning difficult, this inhibits the quality of their musical responses and is a barrier to greater success.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- On average, every class enjoys an hour and a half of high quality class music and singing every week. The curriculum is planned well. There is a long-term overview to ensure appropriate depth and breadth of musical experiences; this is complemented by more detailed termly and weekly planning which takes into account the diverse experiences and learning needs of pupils. Published schemes of work are used and adapted as necessary, together with teachers' own ideas and resources.
- There are four choirs – Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, Chamber and Gospel. There is a small recorder group, and the boys' djembe drumming group. The school provides violin and 'cello tuition, free of charge, to those who wish to extend their musical experience. A few pupils learn instruments outside school, and their skills are also recognised and celebrated.
- The dedicated music room is very well-resourced, including a full range of classroom percussion and electronic instruments. The school has made good use of the music Standards Funding to buy sets of djembe drums, violins, and recorders to provide ongoing instrumental learning across the school.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are outstanding.

- There is outstanding commitment to, and vision for, music across the school, founded on high expectations for standards and participation. Music is at the heart of the school's life, educationally and emotionally.
- An important reason for the school's success is the considerable musical strength of the teaching staff. An unusually high proportion of teachers are confident musicians. The benefits of this can be seen, for example, in the choral work which is conducted expertly by the deputy headteacher, allowing the music coordinator to provide outstanding piano accompaniment that gives additional lift and inspiration to children's singing.
- Whilst the school is rightly proud of its success, it is not complacent. You recognise that there are opportunities to improve instrumental teaching, and the use of ICT, to raise standards even higher across all musical experiences.

Subject Issues

Partnership Links

- There are good links with community partners to provide pupils with opportunities to give and attend public performances. The school is registered with the national singing strategy, and is currently applying for the gold award. The school makes its own arrangement for instrumental music tuition, and does not access tuition from the local authority.

Inclusion

- Inclusion is outstanding. All groups of pupils, including those in the early stages of learning English, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are equally well-represented in extra-curricular activities and additional tuition.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that the first stages of instrumental teaching focus on pupils' aural and musical development, with less dependence on their ability to interpret notation
- making greater use of ICT to record, appraise and evaluate pupils' work.

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