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Miss A Cowings
Headteacher
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Dear Miss Cowings

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 8 July 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 lessons, rehearsals for the Year 6 production, and the drumming performance given by a group of Year 6 pupils from a neighbouring primary school.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. There are some good features and the whole-class instrumental programme in Year 4 is improving provision. At present, however, standards remain broadly average across the school. While there is some good practice, the quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent and is satisfactory overall. There are opportunities for pupils to receive additional instrumental lessons, but the take-up of these is low, as is the proportion taking part in extra-curricular music. Curriculum planning is thorough but pupils' musical development is restricted because, except in Year 4, Key Stage 2 pupils only receive class music lessons for half of the school year.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage show good social skills in musical activities, and the quality of their creative play and musical responses is in line with expectations for their ages. By the end of Key Stage 2, standards are also broadly in line with expectations. Singing is enthusiastic and mostly in tune, although there is very limited development of singing in more than one part. Progress in creating musical ideas is satisfactory.
- The proportion of pupils learning to play an instrument is low, and their instrumental skills at the end of Year 6 are limited. However, the whole-class teaching programme is enabling all Year 4 pupils to experience instrumental tuition, and the school has committed to continuing and extending this programme next year.
- The school choir participates in a number of performance opportunities within the community, such as singing at the local hospital, residential homes, and Birmingham Symphony Hall. Year 6 pupils particularly enjoy preparing for their end-of-year production of 'Bugsy Malone' and there is no doubt that participation in these opportunities has a good impact on pupils' personal development and enjoyment.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with good features.

- Lessons are planned diligently. In some lessons, there is a clear focus on pupils' musical participation through linked activities, and this helps to develop their musical understanding. For example, in a Year 2 lesson, well-modelled singing games at the start of the lesson helped pupils to understand the concepts of pitch and scales that they then explored in more depth using instruments. In this lesson, there was a good balance between teacher explanation and pupils' musical participation. This is not always the case, however. Further observations, and scrutiny of pupils' work and curriculum plans, show that in other lessons there is more emphasis on talking about music rather than a constant emphasis on making music. There is also limited challenge to pupils to improve the quality of their musical performance, or increase their aural understanding.
- Particularly good teaching was observed in the Year 4 whole-class guitar lesson. There was a very good emphasis on the acquisition of instrumental and creative skills through aural development.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very professionally as a teaching tool. Teachers regularly assess pupils' participation in lesson activities, and their demonstration of individual skills. However, these assessments are not effectively related to National Curriculum levels or consider how different skills and knowledge combine to demonstrate pupils' overall musical understanding.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

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

- The music curriculum is based on a published scheme of work, which is adapted by the music co-ordinator, the Key Stage 2 music teacher, and class teachers. While it ensures that most requirements are covered, it is limited in depth because most pupils only receive a weekly class music lesson for half the school year.
- The whole-class instrumental teaching programme, provided by the local authority music service for all Year 4 classes, has improved provision this year and the school has planned to fund and expand this next year. As well as providing good teaching and learning experiences, this programme has also ensured that these pupils receive a weekly music lesson throughout the year.
- Other instrumental tuition is available on guitar, flute, keyboard, and clarinet. Some of these lessons are provided by the local authority music service, and others are provided by private teachers engaged by the school. Take up for these lessons is low. There is a Key Stage 2 choir, but again numbers are small given the size of the school. There are no instrumental ensembles and no additional musical opportunities for pupils in Key Stage 1.
- Pupils have opportunities to experience different styles of music through visiting performers, such as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra ensemble. Older pupils greatly enjoyed the excellent performance given by the visiting drumming group during the inspection. However, whilst these performances enhance the breadth of pupils' musical education, as one-off experiences they do not contribute significantly to the more systematic development of pupils' musical skills, knowledge and understanding.

Leadership and management of music

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

- The school's self-evaluation of music provision rightly celebrates the strengths in provision, including the professionalism of teachers, but is overgenerous in its view of the standards achieved by pupils. However, good vision and leadership has been shown in brokering the whole-class instrumental programme and providing the funding for this to continue next year.
- Throughout the school, there is a diligent approach to planning. The music co-ordinator monitors planning well, ensuring that teachers produce thorough medium and short term plans. This monitoring has focussed largely on the teacher's input into lessons. There has been much less emphasis on monitoring the quality of pupils' musical learning in lessons and this is an important area for further improvement.

Subject Issues

Partnership Links

- There are increasingly effective links with the local authority music service, particularly through the whole-class instrumental teaching programme. There are also very positive links with the local community to provide performance opportunities for pupils. However, there are fewer links with secondary schools, particularly in planning the curriculum.

Inclusion

- The proportion of pupils participating in additional instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities is small, although all groups of pupils are represented.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing participation rates in additional instrumental tuition and extra-curricular activities, building on the success of the Year 4 whole class teaching programme
- ensuring that monitoring focuses on the quality and development of pupils' musical learning and understanding
- ensuring that there is consistency of musical experience throughout the school, both in the quality of teaching and learning enjoyed by pupils and in the regular provision of curriculum musical lessons for all pupils.

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