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15 July 2009

Mr S Boatright
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Boatright

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 24 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 lessons, and a Key Stage 1 singing assembly.

The overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory. Pupils join the school with limited experience of music, and many come from challenging backgrounds with high levels of disadvantage. Over nine out of ten pupils are at the early stages of learning English. While satisfactory teaching and adequate curriculum opportunities help them to make satisfactory progress, this is not enough to help close the gap between their very low starting points and the national expectations for the end of Key Stage 2.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in music are satisfactory.

- Children start school with very low levels of creative experience. A significant number of pupils join or leave the school at different points in the school year and some only stay for short periods. As a result, it is a challenge to assure pupils' long-term musical progression and musical standards across the school remain very low, even for those who have been at the school throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. However, pupils' overall progress in lessons is satisfactory. They make better progress in singing than they do in instrumental and creative work.
- Performance events outside school, organised by the local authority, give a boost to the self-esteem and confidence of the participating pupils. Year 6 pupils say they are enjoying preparing for their class production at the end of term. However, pupils' enjoyment in class music lessons is more limited, and they are right when they say that they would like a wider variety of repertoire and activities, particularly in playing instruments.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- There is good practice in the Early Years, where a child-centred approach to learning enables children to make good progress in responding to music through movement and exploring the different sounds that instruments make. Teaching assistants make a particularly good contribution to this work because they are managed well and respond well to individual learning needs.
- All class and instrumental lessons in Key Stages 1 and 2 are taught by the part-time subject specialist. She also teaches in the Foundation Stage, in addition to other creative experiences that are led by Early Years staff. Lessons are planned clearly and with sound subject knowledge, and confident modelling sets a good example to pupils. However, there is not enough emphasis on the quality of pupils' musical responses. Too often, their first response is accepted without question. This does not help to improve their work. Lesson objectives place more emphasis on the activities to be covered in each session, rather than the improvements that are expected in pupils' musical understanding. The success of lessons is judged by how much is covered, rather than how well the pupils perform. Consequently, pupils make no better than satisfactory progress.
- More able pupils are provided with additional challenge through extra-curricular events and individual piano tuition offered by the music teacher. However, there is insufficient challenge for these pupils in class lessons. Teaching assistants provide good pastoral support for those who find learning difficult, but these pupils receive limited help

with the musical elements of the lesson. Again, this prevents them from making more than satisfactory progress.

- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very well as a teaching tool. Sound files and visual projections are prepared professionally. Pupils have opportunities to explore music through ICT in Year 3, but otherwise there are limited opportunities for pupils to use ICT to record and manipulate sounds, particularly in the later stages of Key Stage 2.

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 ensures appropriate breadth and depth of experience across Key Stages 1 and 2. The music co-ordinator has reviewed the effectiveness and relevance of this scheme to the needs of your pupils, and has planned amendments to the programme in light of her first year at the school.
- The school choir does not meet regularly, but rehearses for specific concerts as they arise. Most of these are out-of-school events organised by the local authority. There is a small recorder club, and individual piano lessons for pupils identified by the school as more able.
- There is not a designated music room; most teaching takes place in the school hall. There is a basic collection of classroom instruments, but a greater range is required if pupils are to make more progress and achieve higher standards, particularly in creative work.

Leadership and management of music

The leadership and management of music are satisfactory.

- Your honest self-evaluation acknowledges that, at present, music is at a point of transition in your school. You recognise that there is much to be done to ensure that standards are improved, and that every pupil is able to participate in good music-making opportunities.
- Coming from a secondary background, the music co-ordinator has understandably needed time to become familiar with the school and to evaluate the scheme of work. However, there is clear ambition for future development. For example, there are plans to introduce whole-class saxophone teaching for Year 5 from September 2009, using the allocated Standards Funding to buy instruments. The school has also started to make use of the national singing strategy materials and is planning to apply for the gold singing schools award.

- The school is well-informed about current issues in music education, and has made good use of the recent Ofsted report to help with self-evaluation and inform future developments.

Subject Issues

Partnership Links

- There are good links with the local authority, including opportunities for pupils to participate in large scale singing events and the recent 'Raps for Gaps' project, which used music to highlight the importance of good attendance.

Inclusion

- The proportion of pupils participating in additional instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities is small. While most groups are represented, not enough is done to ensure that the most vulnerable are included in these activities.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing opportunities for instrumental work, both in the classroom and through additional tuition
- improving participation rates in extra-curricular activities, ensuring that all groups are included equally
- raising standards through higher expectations of what pupils can achieve in class music lessons.

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