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Mr N Chapman
Headteacher
Whitefield Schools and Centre
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Dear Mr Chapman

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 25 and 26 January 2010 to look at work in music.

As outlined in the initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the extent to which all pupils are benefiting from the provision. I also explored the partnerships you may have developed with other schools and agencies to improve continuity and increase opportunity for your pupils.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff; talking with selected pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work, observation of 11 lessons, and a visit to the 'big sing' workshop.

The overall effectiveness of music is outstanding.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is outstanding.

- Pupils in the three schools have profound, severe, and complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. Musical attainment, in relation to national expectations, is low for all ages. However, the progress that they make through music, particularly in developing communication and personal qualities, is outstanding. For example, in a primary music lesson, pupils who find it very difficult or impossible to engage in or sustain a verbal dialogue were confident in maintaining a steady beat and

participating in simple call-and-response games. Pupils are encouraged to make choices and take risks, allowing them to participate actively in all aspects of learning.

- The music therapy programme is effective in helping a significant number of pupils with emotional difficulties to modify their behaviour, integrate with others, and also develop their musical understanding. Individual instrumental tuition is provided appropriately for a small number of older pupils.
- Participation in music is excellent. Regular music sessions are provided for all pupils throughout Key Stages 1 to 4 and a significant proportion are involved in additional workshop activities or special musical events. These give pupils much enjoyment.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is outstanding.

- The specialist music teachers and music therapists have excellent music skills. They are complemented by class teachers who are confident musically and enthusiastic about the subject.
- Teachers have a thorough understanding, not only about how pupils make musical progress, but also about how music can be used to help them achieve in other areas. This is shown in the very clear focus on aural development in lessons. When words are necessary, they are used sparingly and do not inhibit pupils' musical understanding or creative responses.
- Teaching assistants are a particular strength. They participate skilfully and willingly in a way that complements but does not dominate pupils' contributions. They are managed very well by teachers.
- Assessment is used exceptionally well in the primary and music therapy programmes. The school is working in partnership with the Institute of Education to develop and refine this work further. However, assessment is used less thoroughly to support teaching in Key Stages 3 & 4, and the school has identified the need to extend best practice from other areas into the secondary phase.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is outstanding.

- The formal curriculum, together with extra-curricular activities and the music therapy programme, serves pupils very well. Repertoire is age-appropriate, such as the nursery songs and games used with the youngest children and the Caribbean celebration and African drumming songs used in Key Stages 3 & 4.
- The school is at the forefront of developing an accredited qualification in music for Key Stage 4 students, as a unit for the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN).

- There are good resources for music-making, including new technologies. There is a dedicated music therapy room, and several large spaces for performance work. However, the reverberant acoustic qualities of these spaces do not always suit the activities taking place which are occasionally too loud. The building work, in progress, gives an opportunity to improve accommodation for music further and this should include consideration of acoustic control to enhance the development of pupils' listening skills.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in music is outstanding.

- The senior music therapist and the curriculum coordinator are very experienced and knowledgeable about issues in music education. They keep up to date with current issues and offer professional development to colleagues, both in school and through the on-site training centre.
- There is excellent support from you and your senior team, ensuring that music is coordinated thoroughly within the context of overall provision in the three schools.
- Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate, but there is no complacency. Plans to improve provision further include the appointment of additional specialist music staff in Key Stage 3.

Subject issue: inclusion

- Every pupil benefits from music because of the diversity of provision and the way that teaching is tailored to meet individual needs. This includes pupils with the severest cognitive or physical needs as well as those who are more able and have particular interests in playing instruments or singing.

Subject issue: partnerships

- There are strong links with professional organisations to provide experiences that complement regular music lessons. Current work includes a project with London Gospel Arts through the national singing initiative. Partnerships with parents are strong. In a recent independent survey, 80% of parents said music was the subject with which they were most happy at Whitefield.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the acoustic properties of, and monitoring sound levels in, music teaching and performance areas, to support the further development of pupils' listening skills.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop music in the school.

As I explained in the previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector