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Mrs J Mulholland
Executive Headteacher
Glenbrook Primary School
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Dear Mrs Mulholland

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: music

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit with Margaret Dickinson HMI on 24 and 25 May 2010 to look at work in music.

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 senior staff and a panel of Year 6 pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation and of pupils' work; visits to the singing assembly and choir rehearsal; and observation of four class music lessons.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate.

Since February 2010, when the school was federated with two other primary schools in the local authority and you became Executive Headteacher, you have given an extremely strong and accurate message that standards and provision have not been good enough. The refurbishment of the music room and the support that you have given to the music coordinator, who with another colleague gives good leadership of the choir, are clear examples of your intent. However, there has not yet been sufficient effect in overcoming significant shortfalls both in provision and the standards that should be expected of pupils.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- The musical development of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is broadly in line with age-related expectations. Activities observed during the inspection showed children who are inquisitive, imaginative, and well-disposed to learning and working together. Other observations showed that pupils across the school have lively attitudes to artistic activities, together with naturally good listening and rhythmic abilities.
- Standards of vocal work are firmly in line with national expectations. Choral singing is confident, with good diction a significant strength. Older pupils are secure when singing in two parts. However, Year 6 pupils were noticeably less enthusiastic than other groups in the whole-school singing assembly. The choir has increased in size in recent years and now has around 50 members, although the great majority of these are girls.
- However, overall pupils make inadequate progress in developing their musical understanding because there are no opportunities for them to develop instrumental skills or work creatively together.
- Those who sing in the choir benefit greatly from participating in performances, such as the recent concert at the Royal Festival Hall. In other respects, however, important opportunities are missed to improve pupils' learning and well-being through music.

Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Although lessons are planned thoroughly, learning objectives mainly focus on completing a series of activities rather than improving the quality of pupils' musical responses.
- Too much lesson time is taken in giving explanations or instructions. For example, teachers spend as long talking through learning objectives, defining key vocabulary or giving background information as engaging pupils in practical music-making.
- Where teachers are confident performers, they use their skills well to demonstrate. This is particularly the case with singing, where there are two particularly good teacher role-models. However, even where this is the case, teachers' understanding of more complex musical ideas, such as melodic and rhythmic structures, is limited. This makes it difficult for them to improve the quality of pupils' musical responses.
- Teachers find it difficult to monitor or assess pupils' musical progress as they do not keep recordings of pupils' work and pupils do not record their own work in other ways, such as graphic scores.
- Classroom assistants are prepared well by teachers. They work hard and patiently to support the most vulnerable pupils and enable them to participate meaningfully in class activities.

Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- A commercial scheme of work is in place across the school. However, this has not been adapted to suit the needs of either teachers or pupils and its use has not been monitored sufficiently. Significant areas of experience, such as composing work or listening to an appropriately diverse range of musical styles and tradition, are not covered. There is a single-sheet overview of the topics to be covered each term, but this does not give a sufficient indication of how pupils' musical understanding is expected to progress over time.
- In principle, all classes are allocated a half-hour music lesson every week. However, Year 6 pupils have experienced little music this year because of a focus on end-of-key stage tests.
- There is a weekly singing assembly for the whole school, and the popular school choir. However, there are no opportunities for pupils to learn instruments in school and no groups in which they can play together regularly.
- The recently refurbished music room provides a good base for class lessons and rehearsals. There is a reasonable range of percussion instruments, but the legacy of underinvestment in music has still to be overcome.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- There has been poor monitoring of provision in music. This includes a lack of continuing professional development for teachers. Despite the music coordinator's useful experience of choral training from her previous post and a commendable amount of enthusiasm, understanding of how to improve the quality of pupils' musical experiences is insufficient across the school.
- The school has made insufficient use of partnerships to support work in music. Although the choir has participated in the local authority music festival, it is very concerning that no pupils have benefited from sustained work with external musicians, the standards funding for whole-class instrumental teaching, or from individual/small group instrumental or vocal lessons. This is particularly disappointing given the overwhelming enthusiasm and desire of pupils for learning instruments.
- There is no doubt that there is tremendous potential for the development of music at Glenbrook. You and your senior colleagues have a very clear and determined vision for using music to improve pupils' learning and well-being, and you have given a clear statement of intent through the refurbishment of the music room. Choral activities are led confidently, and the teachers' enthusiasm has brought increased membership to this group. Not least, the pupils themselves have very good attitudes and abilities for the arts. This all gives confidence in the capacity for further improvement, with support from your local authority.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing opportunities for pupils to learn instruments through whole-class and smaller group tuition, including accessing the standards funding for Key Stage 2 music and partnerships with external providers and musicians
- ensuring that the planned curriculum:
 - includes appropriate opportunities for pupils to create their own music and listen to a wide range of musical styles
 - shows clearly the musical progress that pupils should make as they move through the school
- improving the quality of lessons by empowering teachers to focus on pupils' musical participation and understanding and reducing the emphasis on explanation and instruction
- providing continuing professional development opportunities in music for staff throughout the school, to secure their musical understanding and knowledge of how to help pupils make good progress in music.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector