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Ms S Walmsley  
Headteacher  
Blacklow Brow Primary School  
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Dear Ms Walmsley

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 on 16 June 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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with pupils and staff; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils work; and observation of five lessons and an after-school choir session.

The overall effectiveness of music is outstanding.

Achievement in music

Achievement in music is good.

- 'Music rocks,' stated one Year 6 boy, summing up the general opinion that music is an aspect of school life that is important to all. Pupils attain above average standards in music. They are accomplished performers and can demonstrate a clear understanding of musical phrase and structure. Pupils sing with a rich tonal quality and give great care to phrasing and diction. They are able to maintain pitch accurately, even when singing for extended periods of time without accompaniment. Their listening skills, while of good quality, are less well developed.
- Music is a highly popular subject and a significant number of pupils participate willingly in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities. All pupils benefit from the school's strong musical ethos which underpins their personal development, raises their self-esteem and develops their

understanding of musical concepts. Work is challenging and most groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve well.

### Quality of teaching in music

The quality of teaching in music is good.

- Pupils learn well because teachers constantly emphasise practical music making to help them learn how to respond musically. Teachers are enthusiastic and grasp opportunities to explore new musical ideas within highly practical lessons. Performing of the highest quality is at the heart of all musical activity and all pupils are given many opportunities to experiment with instruments and voices and to experience making music with others.
- Most teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) skilfully to integrate composing, performing, listening and appraising in a way that helps pupils to develop their musical understanding. This was seen in an outstanding Year 6 lesson where pupils worked in pairs to create well-structured pieces. They used music software to incorporate selected sounds which they then combined and ordered into imaginative raps and songs. They then recorded their own melodic vocal part in real time onto the tracks to complete their piece.
- The whole-class singing sessions and instrumental work are having a positive impact on pupils' progress in their learning, social development and enjoyment. There is a strong belief in 'sound before symbol'. Teaching musically is central to the provision with notation used appropriately to support learning. However, managers are aware that the less confident teachers would benefit from additional training in using the most up-to-date resources for music. Although regular planning takes place, leaders are aware that more formalised joint planning with external providers would lead to more accurate assessment of pupils' academic needs.

### Quality of the curriculum in music

The quality of the curriculum in music is outstanding.

- The music curriculum is outstanding. It meets the needs of all pupils and enables them to make good progress. Opportunities to perform music abound throughout the school. The curriculum ensures that every pupil has the opportunity to be involved in some musical activity be it the choir, steel pans or using computers to create and combine musical sounds. Highly enjoyable musical activities are at the core of the curriculum and opportunities to link themes to musical outcomes are regularly seized. Excellent partnerships with external providers and the local authority music service, along with other visiting musicians, enhance the curriculum exceptionally well.
- Music permeates many aspects of school life. Outstanding music curriculum provision is matched by the good use of music to support learning in other subject areas including literacy and numeracy.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in music

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

- Leaders demonstrate a relentless drive in creating a strong sense of purpose for music. Targets are ambitious and regularly met. Although the school has gained the Artsmark Gold award twice, leaders constantly seek out new ways to ensure music remains central to school life.
- Senior managers and the subject leader share a strong belief in, and vision for, the importance of music for all. This can be seen in the outstanding curriculum opportunities and extra-curricular provision, combined with the outstanding levels of participation and consistently good outcomes for all groups of pupils.
- Senior staff work very closely with the subject leader and use the skills and experience of visiting specialist teachers very well to enhance music provision. Their commitment to ensuring music remains integral to pupils' lives is an example of the exceptionally strong capacity for further sustained improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- further improving pupils' achievement in music by:
  - ensuring all teachers and external providers are even more involved in planning a coherent scheme of work that covers all aspects of the music curriculum and focuses accurate assessment of pupils' work
  - ensuring all staff undergo music-specific professional development to enable them to have more confidence in using the latest musical resources.

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

Anthony Briggs  
Additional Inspector