

Aviation House  
125 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231  
F 020 7421 6855  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



15 July 2011

Mr D Hall  
Headteacher  
Brackensdale Junior School  
Walthamstow Avenue  
Mackworth  
Derby  
DE22 4BS

Dear Mr Hall

### **Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: music**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 5 July 2011 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 staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; observation of eight class music lessons; observation of a whole-school singing session and the Years 3 and 4 end-of-term performance.

The overall effectiveness of music is inadequate. Standards are significantly below expectations in all areas of musical learning. While teachers manage their classrooms effectively, there is insufficient focus on improving pupils' musical understanding. Overall, provision is not closing the gap between your pupils' musical experiences and those typically enjoyed in other schools.

#### **Achievement in music**

Achievement in music is inadequate.

- Pupils join the school with below-average prior attainment, and standards in music remain low throughout the school. Younger pupils sing keenly, although it is noticeable that this enthusiasm tails off in later years. There are also inconsistencies in intonation, tone quality, phrasing and diction.
- Instrumental skills and abilities to create musical ideas are significantly underdeveloped. Performing techniques are not taught rigorously enough

in class lessons and pupils do not develop adequate understanding of melodic and rhythmic structures through composing work.

- Some lunchtime clubs offer the chance to play drums and ukulele, which is enjoyed by a small number of younger pupils. A choir is organised for the Christmas concert, and the school also participates in the annual singing festivals that are organised by the local authorities' music partnership. In the 2009/10 academic year, all Year 5 and 6 pupils participated, for a term-and-a-half, in a 'Wider Opportunities' vocal or string project that was provided through the local authorities' music partnership's standards funding for music. However, at the end of this project, only two out of over 100 pupils wished to continue, even though the cost of this continued tuition was minimal. The project has not been repeated, and now no pupils are receiving additional regular instrumental or vocal tuition in school.

### **Quality of teaching in music**

The quality of teaching in music is inadequate.

- Teachers are thorough in their lesson preparation and manage their classes well. Generic teaching skills are sound and working relationships are good. All lessons contain some form of practical music activity. However, the heavy reliance on spoken and written language, including for extended periods at the start of lessons, means that not enough time is spent developing pupils' musical responses. While understanding the reasons for the school's emphasis on literacy across the curriculum, this approach presents a significant barrier to musical progress, particularly for pupils with language and communication difficulties.
- Appropriate standards of musical response and understanding are not promoted rigorously enough in lessons. Too often, participation in an activity – whether musical or not – is seen as the main measure of success. On other occasions work is at too low a level, such as when learning about beat and pulse in Key Stage 2.
- Information and communication technology is used to engage pupils' interest but this is functional rather than musical. For example, students were asked to drag-and-drop pre-recorded samples into a planning grid to create a jingle, without any consideration or understanding of the musical effectiveness of these choices.
- As a consequence of these shortcomings in the musical aspects of teaching, pupils are not being helped to progress beyond low standards in their musical understanding.

### **Quality of the curriculum in music**

The quality of the curriculum in music is inadequate.

- Commercially published schemes of work are used throughout the school for lessons taught by class teachers but these are not adapted sufficiently to reflect pupils' musical abilities or to promote sufficient improvements in

their musical understanding. Most curriculum requirements are covered but the depth of pupils' knowledge of different musical styles and traditions is limited.

- The time given each week for the whole school to sing together is a positive feature of music. Materials from the national singing strategy ('Sing Up!') are used, including rounds and partner songs, although the emphasis is more on participation than on improving the quality of vocal work.
- While it is encouraging that staff give their time for the occasional local singing concerts and lunchtime clubs, it is disappointing that pupils no longer benefit from the funded opportunities for instrumental and vocal learning. This is particularly so given the context of the school, with higher proportions of pupils than average having a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities, and/or known to be eligible for free school meals.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in music**

The effectiveness of leadership and management in music is broadly satisfactory.

- Despite clear concerns about the quality of provision, appropriate and regular time is given for music, both within the class curriculum and through the weekly singing assemblies. The classroom curriculum is also resourced adequately.
- You have provided funding for a number of workshops by visiting musicians, which have been much enjoyed by pupils. These included a string ensemble and a professional rock drummer. While these have raised aspirations and wider cultural awareness, limited thought has been given to the longer-term impact or the relative cost of these events – particularly in view of the number of pupils who learn to play instruments on a regular basis.
- The music coordinator leads with commendable commitment and enthusiasm. She has satisfactory awareness of current issues and developments in music education, as shown by her own classroom practice, and has benefited from participation in local network events and training. Notwithstanding the disappointing lack of instrumental learning opportunities for pupils, the school has a positive relationship with the local authorities' music service that has included participation in local and regional events. While initial self-evaluation was too generous, through our joint lesson observations you showed a very clear understanding of the reasons why pupils do not make sufficient musical progress. For all these reasons, there is confidence in the school's capacity to make the necessary improvements in musical provision and outcomes for pupils.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- working in close partnership with the local authorities' music partnership to ensure that:

- pupils are able to access and benefit from funded opportunities for additional instrumental and vocal tuition
- an increasing number of pupils continue with this tuition beyond the initial learning programme
- improving the quality of teaching in music by:
  - giving class teachers the confidence to develop pupils' understanding through the use of music as the target language in all lessons
  - ensuring that words and notations are used to support musical learning, rather than to drive the organisation of lessons
  - placing emphasis on the quality of pupils' responses, rather than on their completion of tasks
- raising standards in music by:
  - improving the quality of pupils' intonation, tone quality, phrasing and diction in vocal work
  - increasing pupils' use of classroom instruments to develop their melodic, rhythmic, and technical performing skills.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Mark Phillips**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**