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Mr K Pearce
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Pearce

Ofsted Subject Inspection Programme – Music

Thank you very much for your assistance and hospitality and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 11 July 2008. I would be grateful if you could also pass my thanks to the recorder teacher and the Chair of Governors for the time that they gave to meet with me during the day.

At the end of the inspection I fed back my judgements and this letter is to confirm my findings. As outlined in my initial letter, 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 the links you have developed with other schools and agencies, such as the local Music Service.

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: interviews with members of staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

Whilst there are some good features to music provision at Earl Soham, including opportunities for some pupils to develop their instrumental and ensemble skills through recorder playing, the overall effectiveness of music is satisfactory because pupils make satisfactory progress and achieve broadly average standards by the end of Key Stage 2.

Achievement and Standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- When they join the school, children's musical attainment is in line with expectations. Most are well-disposed to musical learning, and some participate very confidently with secure pitch and rhythm. By the end of Key Stage 2, most have achieved standards in line with national expectations, again with some showing above-average performance skills. A good number are learning to play the recorder and are able to use these developing skills in the recorder ensemble. Other individual pupils are developing instrumental skills through lessons outside school. However, pupils are not able to benefit from small-group or whole-class instrumental tuition provided by the local authority.
- Singing work is much less well-developed. Pupils sing in assemblies, but there is no part-singing, there is not a school choir, and pupils rightly say that they would welcome more opportunities to extend their vocal work. Whilst there is a range of percussion instruments for creative work, pupils are also right to wish for a greater range of instruments and opportunities for composing in curriculum lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall.

- Working relationships in lessons are good, which encourages good behaviour. The music coordinator's good musical and classroom management skills help to engage and motivate pupils. Most lessons feature practical activities that encourage active musical participation. However, with classes including not only a range of abilities but also a mix of age groups, lesson plans are not modified and consequently there is insufficient attention given to the learning needs of individual pupils. Whilst the most able pupils are identified and the school is well aware of their particular music skills and experiences, they are not always challenged sufficiently in class. Pupils with learning difficulties are identified and given support by teaching assistants, but lesson plans are not appropriately adapted to meet their individual learning needs. Consequently, neither group makes more than satisfactory progress overall in curriculum lessons.
- Recordings are made of pupils' work but these are not used effectively to assess the musical progress that they are making. This lack of information makes it difficult for the school to plan work according to pupils' particular needs, interests, and abilities.

Quality of the music curriculum and extra-curricular provision

The quality of the curriculum and extra-curricular provision is satisfactory overall.

- The school uses a commercial scheme of work to assure curriculum coverage across the school in line with national requirements. However, there is insufficient

adaptation of this scheme to ensure that lessons fully meet the needs, interests, and experiences of pupils or enable them to make any better than satisfactory progress.

- The recorder group provides good opportunities for pupils to learn and develop their ensemble skills. This group performs regularly, and the school promotes the work of individual instrumentalists by giving performance opportunities in assemblies and other school gatherings. However, there are no extra-curricular vocal groups in school.
- Recorder lessons are provided by the visiting teacher, who is employed directly by the school. Whilst there are plans for her to extend this teaching to keyboard and guitar, there are currently no other opportunities for pupils to learn additional instrumental skills in school.

Leadership and management of music

The overall quality of leadership and management is satisfactory.

- The music coordinator has good musical skills which he uses particularly well to model work in lessons and to accompany pupils. You joined the school as headteacher in April 2008, and so are in the early days of evaluating what needs to be done to improve the school further. Discussions during the inspection showed that the school has a clear vision for music, understanding of the issues that challenge the school and what needs to be done to improve provision further. Whilst the school was not aware of opportunities such as the whole-class instrumental teaching programme and the national professional development programme for Key Stage 2 music teachers before the inspection, there is a willingness to embrace these opportunities in order to promote further improvement in the school.
- Assessment is a key area for further development. There are inadequate systems for assessing and recording pupils' progress in music, and this means that there is insufficient information available to help teachers plan and modify lessons that meet the specific needs and abilities of pupils.

Subject issues: Data collection and partnerships

- The school has built a very strong partnership with the recorder teacher. However, there is no partnership with the local authority music service at present which limits the range of instrumental opportunities.
- Termly assessment sheets record national curriculum music levels for each pupil, but these are of limited purpose because they are not used to plan or modify lesson plans.

Inclusion

- All pupils are able to access recorder tuition if they wish. Teaching promotes the active involvement of all, although planning does not always ensure that all groups are able to progress at the same rate.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed and agreed, included:

- using assessment more effectively to monitor the progress of individual pupils so that planning better reflects their needs, interests, and abilities
- ensuring that pupils of all ages and all abilities are sufficiently challenged in lessons
- increasing the range of additional instrumental tuition available to pupils, including exploring opportunities for whole-class tuition
- raising standards of singing, including widening the range and repertoire of songs sung in class and in assemblies.

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

A copy of this feedback will be sent to your local authority, will be available to the next institutional inspection team, and will be published.

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 of Schools