

Music in schools: what hubs must do

The challenging conversation with schools

This short survey report challenges all music education hubs to be bold in implementing the National Plan for Music Education and to grasp the opportunity to lead, with schools and other partners, improvement in schools on a major scale.

The survey found that music hubs, working at their very best, can challenge and support school leaders to bring the numerous benefits of a good music education to all pupils, not simply the few who choose, or who have the resources, to specialise in the subject or an instrument. However, Her Majesty's Inspectors found few examples of such good practice.

The report is based on visits to 31 schools, and detailed discussions with their associated hubs, by Her Majesty's Inspectors between February and July 2013, within the hubs' first year. It draws also on findings and recommendations from other recent Ofsted music subject reports, which have consistently concluded that music provision in schools is often weak and poorly led.

The report is accompanied by three short interviews with hub leaders, which focus on challenges and how they are being overcome. The interviews are available on the Ofsted website at:

www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/20130018; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/20130019
and www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/20130020.

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Executive summary

In line with the National Plan for Music Education, 123 music hubs began work in September 2012.¹ They are funded via Arts Council England. From 2012 to 2015, £171 million is allocated to them in order to improve music education by achieving specific 'core' and 'extension' functions.^{2,3}

This survey builds on, and can be read alongside, Ofsted's 2012 report *Music in schools: sound partnerships*.⁴ The current report begins as that one did: in pointing out that there is much to celebrate about music education in England.

The hubs visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors often brought new energy, collaborative approaches and vitality to working musically with young people. They continued to provide instrumental teaching and support orchestras and ensembles, choirs, festivals and holiday music courses.

While this work is essential it reaches only a minority of pupils. This survey is focused on the role of hubs in promoting an effective day-to-day music curriculum in schools for all pupils. It recognises the significant contribution that music can make to the wider life of each school and to broader school improvement.⁵

Previous Ofsted music surveys have reported persistently wide variation in the quality of music education in schools, with too much being inadequate and with meagre musical content.⁶ Music was too often found to be poorly taught, even in schools judged to be good or better overall.

Little has changed in this respect. Key recommendations from previous Ofsted survey reports appear unheeded.⁷ Too often, the schools visited expected little of pupils. They failed to ensure that all pupils understood, and could use practically, common musical features such as notation, time signatures, scales, melody shape, chords and key signatures.

Many primary schools considered, without good reason, that pupils were not ready for such learning involving musical theory, and believed that they would not enjoy it. At Key Stage 3, schools often gave students a range of experiences of different musical styles but musical learning was disjointed and superficial. Classical music was

¹ *The importance of music: a national plan for music education*, Department for Education, 2011; www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-importance-of-music-a-national-plan-for-music-education.

² See the Arts Council England website: www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment/funding-programmes/music-education-hubs/.

³ These are shown in Annex C.

⁴ *Music in schools: sound partnerships* (120282), Ofsted, 2012; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/music-schools-sound-partnerships.

⁵ The national plan for music education summarises some wider benefits of music education.

⁶ *Music in schools: wider still and wider* (110158), Ofsted, 2011; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/music-schools-wider-still-and-wider; *Making more of music: an evaluation of music in schools* (080235), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/making-more-of-music-evaluation-of-music-schools-2005-08.

⁷ The most relevant recommendations recently made by Ofsted are shown in Annex B.

rarely introduced to pupils. At Key Stages 4 and 5, music had become a specialised activity for a small minority.

The root of the problem lay in a lack of understanding, and low expectations in music, among the schools' senior leaders and their consequent inability to challenge their own staff, and visiting teachers, to bring about improvement.⁸ More often than not, they evaluated the quality of music in their schools too optimistically. In each of the 31 schools, HMI observed a music lesson jointly with a senior leader; in only five of the 31 lessons did the senior leader judge the quality of teaching accurately by making informed reference to pupils' musical learning.

Local authority music services, which received central government funding before hubs were established, often historically saw schools as 'customers'. As the 'customers' were frequently not expert enough to know what constitutes high-quality music teaching, or demand what was needed, improvement was unlikely to thrive.

Hubs, therefore, should not be simply asking schools what they need, or offering services that schools can take or leave. They must act as champions, leaders and expert partners, who can arrange systematic, helpful and challenging conversations with each school about the quality of the music education and how the school and hub can work together to improve it.

Some of the hubs visited were beginning to realise this ambition. Many showed the potential and commitment to make a real difference to the quality of class-based music teaching in schools. They noted that two of their funded core functions, which can particularly help hubs to reach out to schools and develop their role among all pupils, are:

- the First Access programme, under which every child should have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument through whole-class teaching in schools
- the singing strategy, intended to ensure that every pupil sings regularly.⁹

In too many cases, however, First Access lessons did not relate to other music teaching in the school and were ineffective. The teaching observed lacked rigour. Many of the hubs visited, especially in large county areas, were failing to reach out to all eligible schools, despite receiving funding to do so. Smaller hubs usually achieved higher participation rates than the larger hubs. The hubs' singing strategies were rarely influential or well-established.

⁸ This also is not new. Ofsted's report *Music in schools: wider still and wider* (see footnote 6) said that more effective musical leadership and management by headteachers and other senior staff in schools was central to bringing about improvement. Not enough school leaders held external partners to account or robustly challenged the quality of classroom music in their own schools.

⁹ See Annex C.

All this needs to change if music education is to take better hold in our schools. The hubs have the remit and funding to bring much-needed transformation. In this report, Ofsted urges them to do so and offers its support.

Key findings

- The hubs' work in 22 out of the 31 schools visited was little different to that provided by the former local authority music services. Too little had changed. In nine schools, however, the advent of the hub had made some difference, not least by beginning to improve the quality of dialogue about music education with the school.
- In all but a few of the 31 schools visited, the music curriculum lacked depth and rigour. Most school leaders in the survey understood neither these weaknesses nor that the local music hub could be a source of expert advice and support in bringing about improvement.
- In some schools, hubs found it hard to get noticed, especially by senior leaders, and gave up too easily. In eight of the schools – six primary and two secondary – the hub's involvement was either non-existent or irregular.
- Too often, hubs provided or sold music services to schools without asking about the schools' existing music provision and failed to challenge the school to improve it.
- Teaching provided to schools by the hubs visited, such as in the First Access programme, was often separated from the schools' own provision; it was not part of a coherent music curriculum in each school.
- Those hubs that had been traditional local authority music services, with leaders whose main experience was in providing instrumental teaching, found it harder to understand how they might engage and challenge schools about teaching in class lessons.
- Some more successful hubs had started tackling weaknesses in schools' music teaching, for example by introducing systems whereby hub staff had periodic discussions about how it could support the school in improving music education.
- Arts Council England asks hubs for considerable amounts of numerical monitoring data but is not yet able to gauge the quality of hubs' work, or help hubs to do so.
- The hubs visited could not show how their work in schools provides, or will provide, best value for public money. We must expect greater impact on music education for all pupils in schools.

Recommendations

Music hubs should, by April 2014, each prepare a school music education plan that enables them to:

- promote themselves with schools as confident, expert leaders of music education in their areas, not simply as providers of services

- expect and secure that all schools engage with them and the National Plan for Music Education
- have regular supportive, challenging conversations with each of their schools about the quality of music education for all pupils in that school
- support all schools in improving the music education they provide, especially in class lessons, and support them in evaluating it robustly
- offer expert training and consultancy to schools, which supports school leaders and staff in understanding what musical learning, and good progress by pupils in music, are like
- ensure that their own staff and partners are well trained and ready to do this work
- spend a suitable proportion of their staff's time on working with school leaders strategically, alongside their work in teaching pupils directly
- publicise their work effectively to schools and explain how it can contribute to school improvement
- facilitate school-to-school support as appropriate
- promote high-quality curriculum progression in schools and ensure that hubs' work in schools is integral to this
- robustly evaluate the impact of their own work on pupils' music education.

Schools should:

- make better use of the provision and funding provided through hubs as part of the National Plan for Music Education
- expect music hubs to provide them with expert advice and challenge – the challenging conversation – and take action on this
- evaluate their musical provision more accurately, especially teaching and the curriculum, and seek training and advice as needed.

Arts Council England, supported by the Department for Education, should:

- take rapid action to improve the reporting and accountability framework for music hubs, ensuring that it contains evaluation of the quality of the work of the hubs in schools; this should include the evaluative examination of hubs' work
- challenge hubs to achieve the best value from the public money they receive
- guide hubs in developing and implementing their school music education plans.

Music education organisations should:

- support the hubs in developing their work and their school music education plans
- help develop better understanding of what works in achieving a better music education for all.

Ofsted will:

- through its National Lead for Music and, as appropriate, other specialist music inspectors, support and challenge hubs in improving their work in schools, by:
 - discussing its findings within the music education sector, thus contributing to understanding and the debate with national bodies concerned with music education
 - visiting a sample of hubs and schools and looking at their work.
- ensure that all school inspectors are familiar with the findings and recommendations within this report.

Introduction: what are music hubs?

1. After its election, the coalition government asked Darren Henley, of Classic FM, to review music education in England. This report was published in February 2011.¹⁰ It outlined and led to a National Plan for Music Education (NPME), published in November of the same year.¹¹
2. Traditionally, central government funding for shared music services was channelled through local authorities. The NPME provided for such funding to continue for all state-funded schools within each local area, but through a different route – music hubs – with some new responsibilities. The hubs were selected through a bidding process, arranged by Arts Council England and established from 2012.¹² Their functions are shown in Annex C. Hubs are, in effect, federations of local organisations with an interest in music education. In most cases, however, local authority music services, or their successor organisations, are the dominant or lead partners delivering most of the work in schools.

¹⁰ *Music education in England: a review by Darren Henley for the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport* (DfE-00011-2011), Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2011; www.gov.uk/government/publications/music-education-in-england-a-review-by-darren-henley-for-the-department-for-education-and-the-department-for-culture-media-and-sport.

¹¹ *The importance of music: a national plan for music education*, Department for Education, 2011; www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-importance-of-music-a-national-plan-for-music-education.

¹² Details can be found on the Arts Council England website: www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/our-investment/funding-programmes/music-education-hubs/music-education-faqs/.